THE CHINESE COIN

"AT LAST WE TALK ALONE," HE SAID

THE CHINESE COIN

BY

SECKATARY HAWKINS

Author of "The Red Runners," "Stormie, the Dog Stealer," "Stoner's Boy," "Knights of Square Table," "Ching Toy," "The Yellow Y," "The Gray Ghost," Etc.

Illustrations by
CARLL B. WILLIAMS

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TO

JULIA BEATRICE ——

A LITTLE FLOWER GIRL

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THE CHINESE COIN

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I

A Message for Hawkins

EVERYBODY in the neighborhood knows about our fights with Ching Toy and his gang. No use to say that we weren't to blame for a lot of the trouble they brought around this old river bank. Jeckerson, the detective from Watertown, had told me that I was the one to catch this little Chinese boy, who always slipped through his fingers. Well, he slipped through mine just as easily and just as often. It was only when he came to this clubhouse of his own free will that I had a chance to catch him, and then I didn't want to. No, because I had found out a few things, and I knew that Ching Toy was not a bad boy.

I found out that the things that Ching did, he was doing to help his father out of great trouble. A gang of Chinese had found out that Ching's daddy had the Magic Triangle, a precious stone that once had hung from a chain around the neck of a god somewhere in China. The Chinese gang tried their best to frighten Ching and his daddy into giving it to them. The only thing that prevented his giving it up was that it had been stolen. A Chinaman who had been a good friend on the outside but a bad egg on the inside had sneaked it away from Ching's daddy and hidden it in a statue.

How it came about nobody knows, but out of all

the million statues that had been cast out of this particular mold, I got the one that contained the sacred stone. Jeckerson once gave me, as a souvenir, a statue off his desk for helping him solve the mystery of the Lonely House. I never once thought that in this little statue that I kept on my desk was the lost gem for which Ching and the Chinamen were scrambling about so madly. But Ching came to me after I had helped to save him from the torture chamber of the Quong Tong. And accidentally we knocked the statue off the desk as we shook hands. It fell in two pieces on the floor. Lo! there was the sacred gem.

Well, Ching wanted to give it to me at first. He said that the statue belonged to me, and so did the stone that was in it. But I shook my head and wouldn't take it. And he told me he was going back to China with his pop, and I bid him a bonbon voyage, and that was the last time I had seen him.

Now school had taken up again and we were busy with our studies, and I had almost forgotten about Ching Toy. And our club met, as usual, every afternoon after school in our little old shack that we called our clubhouse, and things were running smoothly. I would write down the minutes, while Bill Darby took the other boys out into the hollow to begin football practice.

On this particular afternoon Perry Stokes was in the meeting room, cleaning up after the meeting, while I sat in my little room writing down the minutes. And all of a sudden Perry came jumping into my writing room.

"Beggin' your pardon, sir," he said, "I'm afraid that old Ching Toy gang has broken out again, sir. They are comin' up the river path. I saw 'em—"

But I had turned away from him. The newcomers were on the porch, and I walked out to meet them. I recognized them all. There was Cornett leading them. Behind him came Tommy King, and next came the two Tumblesons, Percy and George, brothers, who were always on the outs; and, following these two fighting brothers, was Lan Wong, Chinese boy, a friend of Ching Toy.

I stepped forward to grasp Lan Wong's hand. The little Chinese boy's face lighted up as with a thousand suns, as he would have put it.

"Mighty great glad to meet honorable Seckatary Hawkins once more," he said.

"And I am glad to see you again, Lan," I said, shaking his hand. "Won't you all sit down?"

Perry shoved enough chairs forward from the meeting room, and they all sat around my desk.

"You will wonder," spoke up Cornett, "why we called on you at all."

"No," I said quickly, "I am glad you came. I have been wanting to find out about Ching Toy—how he has made out, and how he got away."

"That's exactly why we came," spoke up the older Tumbleson. "We promised Ching Toy we would come and see you."

"Has he sailed for China with his father, as he said he would?" I asked.

They all looked around, as if my question had made them afraid of something. There was a hush in the clubhouse as Tommy King, leaning forward, said in a low tone:

"No, he has not started yet. The Quong Tong are watching. They mean to kidnap Ching Toy as soon as he puts foot on the ship."

"Great Jehosaphat!" I exclaimed.

"But that they will never do," spoke up Lan Wong. "Ching and his father have changed their plans. Instead of going to Frisco they will sail from New Orleans and go through the Panama Canal, and so on to China. My honorable father has made it possible for them so to do."

"Indeed!" I exclaimed. "Well, boys, I am glad that you have helped Ching. You know, even though I was his enemy—"

"Enemy!" exclaimed Lan Wong, smiling up at me.

"Yeah," I said, "no use beating about the bush. I was after Ching. I meant to get him, too, and turn him over to the old judge, who would have sent him up to the School for Bad Boys. There wouldn't have been any chance for him to get out and go back to China, once he was in there. But I am glad that it didn't happen after all. I want to see Ching and his daddy happy. They will be happy when they get back to China, I am sure."

"If they ever get back," exclaimed Tommy King.

"Won't they get back?" I asked. "What do you mean? If you have some mystery, please let me in on it."

"Well, I'll tell you, Hawkins," said Tommy, "the Quong Tong is a dangerous gang of Chinamen."

"But I thought the detective, Jeckerson, had caught them all," I said.

"That is true," said Tommy, "but he caught only that part of the gang that was in Watertown. You see, they have branches in different big cities. That's why we have to be so careful. Ching's life ain't worth a cent in the United States. Why, say! They would kill him and his daddy without thinking twice about it.

So that's why they sail to-night on the steamship *Kentucky Belle* for New Orleans."

"Where from?" I asked.

"Here," said Tommy, jerking his thumb over his shoulder. "Right from your own little landing. It's all been arranged. We only came to tell you that Ching wanted you to know. He said he wanted us to let you know. That's the only reason we are here."

Before I could put in a question Lan Wong got up from his chair and stepped in front of me.

"Ching said for me to say to you that of all the Tong there was none so to be feared as Mui Fong. He told me to warn you."

"Why?" I demanded. "Why did he want you to warn me, Lan?"

"Because," said the little China boy, "because they have found out—the Quong knows how you and your friend fooled Mui Fong, the watcher at the door. They know, you see, how you got past the door, mistaken for somebody else. And they know, because of this mistake, Ching Toy slipped through their fingers. Therefore they have marked you for their next victim. Mui Fong feels very badly about it, because he was the watcher at the door and you fooled him. And Ching says Mui Fong is a very dangerous Chinaman. He will pay you back some day."

I laughed. "Let him try," I cried out. "Let Mui Fong try. Let any of them try that have been caught and put in prison by Jeckerson, the detective. They are there to stay for many years. At least I shall not have to fear anything very soon."

. . . . . .

That night we held singing practice at the clubhouse,

and along about nine o'clock we were interrupted by the sound of mixed voices and, going out, we saw Doc Waters, our old friend, and Jeckerson, the detective, in front of our clubhouse. But lower down, on the river landing, we saw more people and lights.

"What's up, Doc?" I asked, as I ran ahead of the other boys, who followed me from the clubhouse.

"Ching Toy's going to board the steamboat here," said Doc. "You knew about it, of course?"

"Yes" I said "I know." But I wondered how Doc had found out that I knew. He and Jeckerson always had secrets that they held from me.

"Here comes the boat" spoke up Jeckerson. "We might as well go down. No telling what might happen in a case like this, Doctor, and it's best to be prepared. My stars! I'll be glad when I see that Chinese kid and his daddy safe on board and bound from this old United States."

"So will I," I added.

Before I took notice of the sharp look he had turned toward me, I shot forward down the path and they all followed me. The glare of two or three sets of automobile lamps shot here and there across the green of the river bank. Evidently there had been much preparation for this departure and everything was ready. The lights of the *Kentucky Belle* were already visible above the upper bend of the river. The place was buzzing with half-drowned voices.

"Hawkins!"

The sudden mention of my name startled me. I turned my face and extended my hand even before I knew it was Ching Toy who had addressed me. We were aside of the road, separate from all the others, and practically alone.

"Ching Toy!" I exclaimed. "I didn't expect to meet you again!"

"No," he said with a smile, "but I made it so. It was my wish that we depart from your old river bank; from the place that I hated most when I knew the least. I have learned much in your America. To-night I go to China—forever."

"No!" I exclaimed. "Not forever, Ching. Some day, somewhere, somehow, we must meet again. We are only boys. Life is big. There are many years ahead—"

"No," said Ching. "For me it is forever. If the gods be kind, perhaps some day I may shake this hand again. You have been kind to me—"

He had caught my hand. His fingers pressed against mine.

"Yeah," I said, "some day we shall shake hands again, Ching. You were a wonderful boy—"

"And you were wonderful to me, Seckatary Hawkins—" he broke in.

There came a toot. The whistle of the steamboat that told us it wouldn't wait a second longer than it had to in order to take on the baggage and passengers who had been booked to New'rleans.

"Good-by, old Seckatary," came Ching's voice in my ear. But my eyes were moist and glued on the shimmering lights that danced reflections on the water from the decks of the *Kentucky Belle*. "Good-by, my old enemy—"

"Good-by, Ching," I said softly. "Good-by—good-by—come to see me some time—"

"Some time:" it seemed Ching's voice said it, but perhaps it was only an echo of my own voice.

I felt something pressed into my hand. I didn't

have time to think twice of it before the whistle blew again. The big boat was waiting patiently at the dock. Ching Toy ran—oh, boy, how he ran! I watched him as he leaped aboard, refusing the gangplank, landing squarely on his feet, and, turning swiftly he waved his little cap at us:

"Good-by—good-by—"

. . . . . .

"Good-by" rang in my ears even after I had reached the quiet of my writing room again. The other boys had waited for Doc Waters and Jeckerson, and together were seated around the table in the meeting room, jabbering about this, that, and the other thing, but I was not interested. No. I had spread out before me the sheet of paper that Ching Toy had pressed into my hand just before he left. I smoothed it out upon the desk before me and read, in those quaint Chinese-American letters that Ching always used to write, the following words:

"*Take warning! This from your friend, Ching Toy, who once was your enemy, as you were his. Mui Fong has sworn to get even with Seckatary Hawkins. Please, Hawkins, keep your eyes and ears open. Mui Fong is the worst of all. Even Hi Shang is not as bad. Beware of Mui Fong.*"

I crumpled the paper in my fist as I looked up, and I grinned. Mui Fong, eh? Well, I needed a warning, maybe. But Mui Fong was harmless. He had been caught and was in jail. Jeckerson told me so himself. All of those Chinamen in the Quong Tong at Watertown, they had all been caught and were held safely in jail. I laughed to myself, but I don't know whether it was because I was so sure, or because Ching had been

so fearful of my safety. Mui Fong, indeed! The great big stiff! I should be afraid of a great big, overgrown Chinaman, who had taken a grudge against me because he himself had made a mistake! "Ah, let me laugh," I said to myself. Mui Fong was safe behind prison bars. I began to hum a popular song. I had nothing to fear.

But my joyful self-assurance was broken into roughly by the sound of the telephone bell. It jangled noisily beside my desk. I grabbed the receiver off the hook.

"Yes, this is the Hawkins clubhouse," I answered the call. "Who? Jeckerson? Yes, he is here. Just a moment, please."

I stepped to the curtained doorway, and Jeckerson met my look.

"It's for you," I said.

He came in and took up the receiver.

"Yes, Jeckerson speaking. What? *What!* Please say that over again—"

There was a silence. Every boy in the meeting room, and Doc Waters with them, had crammed their heads into the curtained doorway. They were all watching Jeckerson. He hung up the receiver without another word.

"Boys," he said, turning around in the chair, "something has gone wrong at the prison—something has happened that I am afraid to tell—"

"Tell it!" I said harshly, as he turned his eyes full upon me.

"Yes," he said, "I'll tell it. Mui Fong has escaped from the jail!"

Mui Fong! Escaped! The note from Ching Toy! How it all popped into my head at once! I could not say a word. Doc Waters saw, I suppose, that to me the

news of Mui Fong's escape had more meaning than to anyone of the club.

"Boys," said Doc, softly, "it is time we adjourn. Suppose we all go home quietly. To-morrow you can meet at the usual hour. And if you need us, you may call upon Mr. Jeckerson and me for help."

Which we did.

II

Halloween

"WHAT are you goin' t' wear on Halloween, Hawkins?" asked Bill Darby, as we met in the clubhouse after school to hold our regular meeting.

"I think I'll be an Indian," I told him. And Jerry Moore, sitting next to him, laughed at me.

"You're an Indian, all right," he said. "You won't need the suit. I'm going to get a clown costume."

"You could play that part without the costume, too," I shot back at him. The boys all laughed at that, and I guess Jerry would have started a fight, but our captain hit the table with his wooden hammer and called the meeting to order.

When the meeting was over, we went up to Watertown, to the little costume shop and picked out our suits. I got a dandy Indian suit, feathers and everything. The costume man told me it was made like the one old Sitting Bull used to wear, and as I was a little stout I would look just right.

While we were waiting for the parcels, in came a bunch of boys whom we had never met. They were very noisy. They went right up to the counter, and the smallest one in the bunch said he wanted a fireman's suit. The costume man found a little red fireman's shirt and a pair of blue trousers to go with it, and a fireman's helmet, which was a little large for the boy's head, but he said he could stuff newspapers inside so it would fit snug.

On Halloween night we met in the clubhouse, as usual, and Perry Stokes came up to me when I arrived and said that we ought to keep somebody in the clubhouse on a night like this. I asked him why he thought so, and he told me that he had seen some strange boys on the river bank before I had come down.

"Tell you what, Perry," I said, "I'll stay down here myself, and you go up and have some fun with the other fellas for an hour or so, then you come down and take my place so's I can go uptown."

That suited Perry all right, so he got into my Indian suit, and when the other fellows were all dressed up and ready they went uptown, where the regular Halloween crowd was already parading. The sound of tooting horns and whistles and whirling racket-makers had already started. And as I sat there in the little clubhouse alone I could just imagine the doings up on Main Street. I finished the writing I had started after school that day, and then I walked out onto the porch, for it was a nice evening and not so cold. A big moon hung like a jack-o-lantern over the Pelham Hills, and its soft light touched the treetops with silver. Just as I was about to turn inside again I saw a shadow cut across the moonlight on the river, and I knew it was a boat. I went in and got one of our baseball bats out of the cupboard and stood it just inside the door, where I could reach it in case I needed it. Then I shoved my hands into my pockets and looked out of the door.

There were three dark figures coming in single file along the evergreens that line the river path. They were figures of men, and as they emerged into a little patch of moonlight I saw they were Chinamen. Mui Fong! was the thought that popped at once into my mind, and I recalled that he had sworn to get even with

me for helping Jeckerson, the detective, capture his crooked band. I stepped quickly inside and slammed the door and threw the bolt home. I began to shake—that's one bad habit I have when I get excited—and I turned the lamps low and hurried into my writing room. There came the sound of steps upon the porch and short, low-voiced mutterings. I heard the latch raised as someone tried to open the door. I knew it was old Mui Fong! By Jinks! you can't fool me. Something told me it was the old Chinaman, and then I slid quietly out of my chair and picked up the baseball bat beside the door, and just as I was turning around with it there arose a shout, followed by such a loud pounding on the door that scared me so badly that I took one jump and landed with a thump in my chair.

"Who's there?" I called in a shaking voice.

There was no answer, but instead there arose shouts around the clubhouse at different places, and I heard the sound of running feet. I ran to the window and saw figures running up the river path toward town, and one man standing beside the path watching the running figures. He turned and came back to the porch, and I gripped the baseball bat and stood waiting. His step came again on the porch and then a knock on the door.

"Hawkins!" It was Jeckerson's voice, our old friend, the detective, from Watertown. Oh, boy! What a relief! I leaped to the door and opened it quickly.

"Gee! I'm glad you came," I said. "I never had such a scare in my life."

"Glad you're safe," said Jeckerson, as he chewed on an unlighted cigar. "I had a notion that the old fellow would try to get you. I thought I might not get here in time, but I didn't want to let him know I was on his track. Those two dumb deputies I had with me spoiled

it all by their shouting. They are chasing them uptown now, but they'll never lay hands on the Chinaman."

"There were three of 'em," I told him. "I saw 'em come from the river, where they left their boat. They'll have to go back that way, won't they? Why can't you lay for 'em till they come back to their boat?"

"Thanks for the advice," said Jeckerson with a grin, "but that won't work in with the plan I have. Sit down for a minute, will you? Don't shake so much. What are you afraid of, anyway?"

"I guess you'd be afraid, too, if Mui Fong threatened to get you," I answered.

Jeckerson nodded.

"I know something," he said, "that will interest you. Why aren't you uptown wearing your Indian suit in the Halloween celebration?"

"How did you know I had an Indian suit?" I demanded.

"Somebody spied on you when you were in the costume shop," answered Jeckerson. "And Mui Fong was told that he would recognize you by an Indian suit that you had hired. Now then, which one of the boys in this club is giving away your secrets?"

"Not one," I said stoutly, for I have absolute faith in my friends. "Perhaps—yes, it must have been one of the kids who came in just as we were leaving the costume shop—"

Jeckerson got up and motioned impatiently to the door.

"Come on," he said, "you will have to help me catch Mui Fong to-night. Old Judge Granbery is awfully excited. I told him this afternoon that I would protect you boys, but he was bent on having you boys all stay at home to-night."

"Stay at home on Halloween?"

"I told him it wouldn't be fair. You see, I had to tell him when I found out where Mui Fong would be. We've been on the trail of the old Chinaman for weeks, but this is the first time we got a clew to his whereabouts. Wait! There's someone at the door."

"It's only Perry Stokes," I said, as the door opened and Perry came in, as he had promised.

"I had lots of fun, Hawkins," said Perry, after he had spoken to Jeckerson. "Get into this Indian suit and go up. You'll sure like it, sir. There's a thousand people on the street."

We didn't tell Perry anything about Mui Fong, although I think he guessed something was up, by the fact that Jeckerson was there. But I slipped into my Indian costume and put the feathers on my head and picked up the tomahawk.

"Keep that in your hands," said Jeckerson. "You might need it. Now come on."

Perry's eyes widened as he heard Jeckerson's words, but I told him to keep the door locked and sit in my writing room and read until I came back. Then we went out.

"You go ahead now, Hawkins," said Jeckerson, as we reached Main Street, "and I'll follow and keep my eye on you. I'll be close enough in case Mui Fong tries anything. I have half a dozen men around here, anyway, and it's hardly likely that there will be any trouble."

I strolled on, keeping my eyes open for my own playfellows, but it was like looking for a needle in a haystack. Everybody was disguised in Halloween costumes. And there was so much noise, too, that I had a time keeping my red man's wits about me. When I came into the crowd the people all remarked about my suit, and as I

had a false face on, they wondered who I was. But finally I was swept along in the crowd, and I turned to look for Jeckerson and saw him about fifty paces behind, on the sidelines, walking with two other men. There was a tall fellow in a Spanish bull fighter's suit right alongside of me, and he grasped my arm and said, "You must meet the other Indian chief. He's over there." I saw the big fat Indian, who was much taller, and his costume was finer-looking than mine. And the three of us were swept along with the crowd, people turning to look at us and to say funny things about us. At a corner the crowd was so thick it was hard to get through, and my companions tightened their holds on my arms, and between them they shoved me forward; but I was frightened and pulled myself free from them and they were swallowed up in the crowd, while I got clear and stood to one side and let the mob go by. Jeckerson hurried up to me.

"You're lucky," he said, with a chuckle. "If you had gone along with them—"

"Who? You mean the bull fighter and the big chief?"

"Sure. The big Indian is Mui Fong. The bull fighter was one of his pals. They spotted you as soon as you came along, and I spotted them. Come on, let's see if we can find 'em again."

He gave a shrill whistle, at which I saw several of his men start from different places along the street and follow us. He took my arm and swung me clear of the crowd and into a little narrow, dark street, at the end of which a street lamp threw a circle of dim light upon the corner. Almost immediately there came tearing around the corner the bull fighter and the big chief and, surprised at seeing Jeckerson waiting for them, they wheeled swiftly and were gone back the way they had

"HOLD IT HERE --- LET'S SEE IT," SAID THE BOY WITH THE TORCH.

come. Jeckerson called for us to follow and they sped ahead. I am too fat to run so fast, and in the excitement they forgot about me, I guess. I had to slow up and get my breath. I still could see the dim figures of Jeckerson and his men as they stopped below the ramshackle warehouse that had not been used for many years and was falling to pieces.

I was just starting forward again when I heard low voices behind me, and I moved over to the side of a high board fence as three boys came up. They stopped almost in front of me, and I silently slid through a hole in the fence where a board was missing, and lucky I did, too; for just then one of the boys struck a match and lit a rosin torch.

"He gave me a quarter," said the tallest of the three boys, "but I can feel a hole in it. I bet it's no good."

"Hold it here; let's see it," said the boy with the torch. He held the light so that they could see what was in the tallest boy's hand. By Jinks! I knew that little kid with the torch. It was the same one who had picked out a fireman's suit at the costumer's shop. He was wearing it now.

"That ain't no quarter," said the third boy: "that's a piece of Chinese money, John. The old codger fooled you."

"The big stiff!" said the tallest boy, as he looked at the money. "For what I done for him, too, and all the stuff I had to find out for him. I told him what kind of Halloween suits all the boys picked out at the shop, and then I showed him our hiding place in the old warehouse, where he could hide—the big stiff! Givin' me a bum piece of money!"

"Stay here," said the little one with a torch. "I'll fix him."

And I jumped back just in time, for he shoved his torch through the broken fence and came through after it, and then, holding the blaze on high, he sped through a field down toward the river and the darkness swallowed him up. In silence I crouched behind the fence, not wanting to let the other two boys know I was there. They talked in low voices and I could not understand what they said, and I wished they would go away so that I could hurry to join Jeckerson. In five minutes I heard the little kid in the fireman's suit returning. But he did not have his torch.

"Come on now," he said to his two friends. "Let's wait and see the apparatus."

I wondered what kind of apparatus he meant. I was even surprised to hear him use that big word. But they sped back to the main part of town, and I got up out of my hiding place and ran up the street. Jeckerson and his men met me on the run.

"Thank goodness!" exclaimed Jeckerson. "Thought we had lost you, Hawkins. Didn't see any more of Mui Fong and his pals, did you? Thought they might have given us the slip and come back this way."

"They're up in the old warehouse," I told him.

"No, they've left there. We found their costumes there, with this note."

He handed me a card and turned on his flashlight so that I could read. Here is what it said:

"*Mui Fong is sorry he could not wait for Honorable Jeckerson, but he is in great hurry. It was a most happy evening entertainment. Very soon see you again. Hope so. Good-by.*"

A sudden exclamation from one of Jeckerson's men made us all turn. There was a red glow mounting the

sky and from the old warehouse a spurt of flame leaped up. Up in the town the cry of "Fire!" mingled with the jangle of the fire engines already speeding to the scene. My mind went back to the little boy in a fireman's suit, who had gone away with a torch and had come back without one. I also remembered what they said of the person who had given them a piece of Chinese money. The kid in the fireman's suit had said "I'll fix him." I wondered now whether Mui Fong himself had set the place on fire, or whether that little kid accidentally left his torch on a pile of rubbish in the old broken-down warehouse. No wonder he said "Now let's wait for the apparatus."

Fire engines. Was he a kid who liked to see the fire engines turn out? Well, you know a fellow does not like to be suspicious, and I did not like to think it of the little kid in a fireman's suit. But, anyway, those thoughts were running through my mind when Jeckerson, taking my arm, said:

"Come on, Hawkins. We must round up all your club members and see that they get back safe."

Which we did.

III

The Fire Bug

ON MONDAY afternoon right after school we boys gathered in our clubhouse for our regular meeting.

"Any new business?" asked our captain.

Before anyone could answer, a knock sounded on the door and Perry Stokes went to open it. A man and a boy stood on the porch.

"Is this the Seckatary Hawkins clubhouse?" asked the man, in a thin voice that shook a little.

"Yeah," I said, getting up and coming forward. "I'm Seckatary Hawkins. Can I do something for you, sir?"

The man smiled.

"I don't know," he said, "but Judge Granbery thinks you can. He told me to bring my boy down here —this is him—his name's Samuel. The Judge said I should leave him with you—said I should turn him over to Seckatary Hawkins."

Before I had time to move, the man slipped out of the door and slammed it shut behind him. Then only did I take a good look at the little kid he had left behind. By Jinks! It was the same little boy who wore the fireman's costume on Halloween. He looked up at me with big eyes.

"I'm gonna like you," he said with a grin. "Gee! this is a swell joint."

"Please don't call it a 'joint,' " broke in our captain. "As long as you are in this clubhouse you will call it a clubhouse."

"I'm a nut," said Samuel, with a short little laugh. "Don't mind me. I don't know nice words so much as you. I don't mean to hurt nobody's feelin's. I like this joint first rate."

"Come here, Samuel," I said to him, and I led him over to my little writing room. Holding the curtains aside for him, I allowed him to pass within. Then I turned to the boys around the table and said:

"Judge Granbery has a hand in this. We don't know what it's all about, but as long as the judge sent this kid down here, we've got to go slow. I'll wait till I hear what the Judge has to say before I do anything. In the meantime I'll take charge of this kid, and you fellas go ahead with the meeting and get through as quick as you can."

For I had a notion that Judge Granbery would pay me a visit that day. Nor was I mistaken. Hardly had the boys adjourned the meeting and gone out into the hollow to play football when I heard Judge Granbery's step on the porch.

"Well, Hawkins," began the Judge, "I sent a boy up here to you—a boy named Samuel. I told his daddy to be sure that he turned the boy over to you. What have you done with him?"

"I gave him into the keeping of Perry Stokes," I answered. "Perry has taken him down to the hollow to watch the other boys play football. I thought that would be best, sir. We must get him acquainted first."

"Good!" exclaimed the Judge. "He's a pretty tough youngster, if I must say it, although I hate to say anything about a little boy like that. But I knew if he played with you boys a while—got to rubbing up against law and order, you see, he would turn out well, and it wouldn't be necessary for me to send him up

to the School for Bad Boys. That's why I sent him up here to join your club."

"Yes," I said, "we like to help out, Judge, but you forgot that we can't take into this club anybody who is not voted in as a member by all the boys in this club."

"But I'm the judge!" cried he, bristling up and stamping the floor with his cane. "I order it, sir!"

"You can order and order," I told him, "but you won't get anywhere that way. Boys are boys, and if you force them to do something, you'll get it done, but you won't get it done right. That's why I'm telling you. You can't drive the kids in this club, Judge. You can get 'em better by kind words. You can get anything you want if you know how to go about it."

The Judge shook his head impatiently.

"Perhaps I don't know how to go about it," he said, "but I know what I want, so I will ask you to go about it for me, so that we get the result we want. This Samuel kid is a fire bug."

"A what?" I said.

"You heard me—fire bug," said the Judge. "He's been setting fire to things ever since he was old enough to know what a match was. He's set fire to a half dozen houses already, and each time there was a great loss."

"Something's wrong with that kid, Judge," I told him.

"I should think there was!" he exclaimed. "And I think you're the boy who can do more with him than anybody, Hawkins. You're the one to break him of the habit—it's only a habit—"

"Hold on, Judge," I broke in. "Don't pay me compliments. How should I know what to do to break this

kid of that dangerous habit? You ask me to do thing for you that I ain't able—"

"Enough of that!" said Judge Granbery, and could tell by the tone that he did not want to argu with me. "I'll stake my word on you. You'll ge around this boy, somehow. You'll find out why h does these things, and you'll show him that it's th wrong thing to do. At least, I'm willing to take a chanc on you, Hawkins."

I got up and shrugged my shoulders.

"All right," I said, "as long as I won't be blamed I fail. I'll take Samuel under my wing, Judge. I'll tr to find out if there is a way to cure him."

The Judge got up, pleased.

"I knew you would," he said. "You are an obstina boy, Hawkins, but you have some good sense. I nee not talk to you further. You understand me."

I did not answer him on that. I did not even loo up again, but stood by the window with my hands my pockets, gazing out into the hollow where the boy were playing their football game. I was unaware of h departure until I heard the outer door slam shut.

I had told Perry Stokes to bring Samuel back befo the game was over, so I could talk to him alone. In little while Perry ushered him in, and I pointed to t chair beside my desk. He sat down.

"Samuel," I said, "you said this clubhouse was 'swell joint.' "

"It sure is," he hurried to say. His face was smiles.

"Well, listen to me," I said. "If you expect to be member of this club, you've got to be a better boy th you have been. See?"

"Why!" he exclaimed. "Did my father tell you

was a bad boy? If he did, don't you believe him. You just ask my mother. She'll tell you—"

"Yeah, I know," I cut him short. "I know what mothers always say about their boys. But that won't get you by here in this clubhouse. You set fire to places, don't you?"

I asked the question in a lower tone. His face seemed to light up at the mention of fire.

"Sh!" he whispered. "Don't let it out. Nobody knows. But I'll tell you. There's fun in setting fire to places. You remember the Holloween fire? Yeah, I know you do. Well, I done it."

I watched his face closely as he spoke, and believe me, it was a study. There seemed to be pure joy in his eyes when he talked about fire. I couldn't understand it, but of course I knew that little Samuel did.

"Why do you do it?" I asked. "Do you like to see the fire engines turn out? Do you like excitement like that?"

"How do I know?" He spread out his hands before me as he spoke. "I never wait to see the fire engines. What do I care about the fire engines, I ask you? I've got enough to do to get away after I set fire to a place. You don't think I want to be caught, do you? I wouldn't-a been this last time, only I ran up a dead street and had to come back. You see, there's where I made my one mistake. I hadn't looked to see whether or not that street was a dead street. I just thought it was a regular street, you see. But—"

He stopped for an instant, as his lashes dropped over his eyes and his gaze rested on the floor.

"They caught me that time."

I nodded my head.

"Yeah," I said, "they caught you that time, and

they knew who it was that had set fire to the other places, too. You're a bad egg, Samuel, aren't you?"

He turned a defiant face to mine.

"No," he said quietly, "I like a fire, that's all. If that's a bad thing for a boy to like, then I'm bad, sure. But I don't think it is. And I'm not bad, either. You ask my mother; she'll tell you—"

"Dry up!" I cried. "I know what your mother would tell me. Don't keep on telling me that. But if you ever try to set fire to this clubhouse—"

He threw up his hands as in horror at the thought.

"Nev-err!" he exclaimed. "This clubhouse? Why, Seckatary Hawkins, I'm proud to be a member of this. I'll try to bring fame to this club—I will for a fact. The next time I set fire to a place—"

But I stopped him. I arose and laid my hand on his arm.

"There's not going to be any next time," I said. "From to-night on, Samuel, you and I are going to be partners. How's that?"

He shoved out his hand.

"Shake!" he said. "You're on."

"All right," I said, "on one condition. That is, you've got to promise me to break yourself of the dangerous habit of setting places on fire. If you must have a fire, go down to the river bank and build a bonfire. But no more houses. Will you?"

He didn't take my hand. I held it out to him, but he turned away.

"This sure is a swell joint," he said.

Before I could say another word to him the other boys came back, and there was plenty of noise in the meeting room. Samuel seemed nervous, and would have tried to climb out of a window if Perry Stokes had not

kept his eyes on him. I told Perry Stokes to keep Samuel in my writing room while I went out to talk to the other boys.

I found them all seated around the table and took my place at the farther end. Dick Ferris got up and asked for me to report to the boys what the Judge had said. So I got up and told them of Judge Granbery's visit and of what he had told me. I said that I thought it was a compliment to every boy in the club to have Judge Granbery come down and tell us that he thought we could cure a boy of such a bad habit as setting fire to houses.

"You've talked to the kid," spoke up Shadow Loomis. "What do you think of him?"

"I think a whole lot of him," I said, warmly. "I want to help him. Something's wrong with a kid who sets fire to places just for the fun of it. Samuel's no bad boy. He says so himself, and says his mother will prove it. Of course that doesn't mean anything. But I'd like to have you give Samuel a chance to come forward himself and talk to you boys. Don't be too hard on him if he uses words you ain't used to. But let him talk. And I think you'll like him."

I motioned toward the curtains, and Perry, seeing my signal, brought the little fire bug out.

"Well, Samuel," I said, "these boys want to take you into the club for good, but they want to hear you tell 'em that you are through with fire alarms and all that. You'll never set anything on fire again, will you? And you won't have anything to do with fires at all, will you? You promise that from now on you won't even sit up and take notice when you hear a fire bell, will you, Samuel?"

Samuel's face was sorrowful. He gazed around on

the faces of the boys at the table, and finally his eyes rested upon me.

"I'm sorry I bring you fellas trouble," he said. "I know I been a nuisance in this here town, and I know I got a weakness for fires and fire bells, and all that. But I do think this is a swell joint—"

"Don't call it a 'joint'!" broke in our captain.

"Excuse me," said Samuel weakly; "I forgot. I'll not call it a joint again. It's a swell clubhouse, and I'd be mighty much obliged to you fellas if you let me join the club and be here every day after school, and I'd promise I'd never listen to a fire bell, I'd never run after a fire engine, and I'd never even strike another match when nobody was looking. I'd never do anything like that if you'd just let me be a member of this club—"

"That'll do," cut in our captain. "I ask for a vote by silence; that is, if anybody votes for this boy, all he has to do is to keep silent. If he votes against, he has to speak out and say so."

But nobody spoke out and said anything. Even Jerry Moore kept silent, and the loud whack of the wooden hammer was followed immediately by Dick's voice:

"Samuel, you are a member of this club, on the agreement that you will never—"

But just at that particular moment something made Samuel leap into the air. Just at that moment there came upon the evening breeze the well-known warning notes of the fire bell in the tower of the engine house. One—two—three.

"One twenty-three!" yelled Samuel, leaping to his feet. "Boys, I know that box! It's the old tobacco

warehouse. Fire! Fire! Fire! Come on! See it! Fire—fire—"

And before any of us could get to him he had leaped through the door, across the porch, and out upon the river path. The fire bells were repeating the call—one twenty-three, the box call at the old tobacco warehouse, but for once in our lives we were not anxious to run to see the fire.

I started up to say something, but my voice died in my throat. Dick was about to hit the table again with his wooden hammer, but he held it poised in the air. Jerry Moore had risen, but his hand held to his chair and he did not move. Shadow Loomis stared through the gathering gloom on the river path, but there was nothing to be seen. Only a slight glow of vermillion on the darkening sky from the direction of the old tobacco warehouse, but not a sign of Samuel or any other living thing.

"This meeting is adjourned," called out our captain, and the suddenness of his voice startled us all. "We might as well go down and see the fire."

Which we did.

IV

Little Sam Is Cured

OUR meeting to-day was short. The boys hurried out to play and I returned to my writing. But somehow or other I could not keep my mind on my work. I threw down my pen and sat there with my hands folded and looked out of the window.

Three boys were coming down toward the clubhouse. I recognized one—little Samuel. I watched them as they stood for a moment on the river path talking. Then the two boys went back up the path and Little Sam came on down to the clubhouse.

"Well," I said, as he came into my writing room, "this is the first time you have been late to our meetings. What's the matter, Sam?"

"I went with Guy Malapo and his brother," he said. "I went with them to see the horses."

"What horses?" I asked.

"Their pop owns the stables up on Wheeler Street. He has an express-wagon business. They got some new horses yest'day from across the ocean—great big strong horses, fine ones. I had to go and see 'em with Guy and Stan—they wanted me to. And I just love horses, Seck."

"Most every boy does," I said; "and I'm glad to see you taking an interest in something else than fire."

He winced as I said those last words. But he wouldn't say anything.

"Sam," I continued, "do you know what I think of a kid who sets fire to a place and runs? I think he's

the biggest coward in the world. I don't think a kid like that has any courage. He is no more than a scared puppy. He hasn't got any spunk."

Sam nodded.

"I guess you are right," he said, "but somehow I ain't afraid. I wasn't even afraid when they caught me at it. I don't think I'm a coward, Hawkins, and I wish you wouldn't think so. First time I get a chance I'll prove it to you."

"Sam," I said slowly, "you'd be a fine kid if you would only promise to keep away from fire. It gets you into trouble, and some day it might even cost you your life. That's why I want you to come to me, of your own free will sometime, and tell me that you are through with it forever. I don't want you to tell me here and now, because I know you won't mean it. But when you've figured it out for yourself, you come and tell me. That'll be all now. Run out and join the boys."

That night we had singing practice at seven o'clock, and all of the boys were on hand early. Perry Stokes had the little stove going strong, as there was plenty of firewood now, each boy having brought in his full share.

I joined in the singing, standing beside little Sam, who didn't quite know just how to act, as this was his first singing practice. But I encouraged him along and he sang pretty well.

And then, while the singing was at its loudest, I heard the faint tinkle of the telephone, and I took little Sam's arm and led him into my writing room. I took up the receiver and answered.

"This you, Hawkins?" It was Doc Waters' voice. "All right; glad I found you. There's a big fire uptown, and I thought it would be a good idea for you to bring

little Sam up. Make him watch the fire and see how terrible it is—you understand? All right—"

"Wait a minute," I called into the phone. "Where is the fire, Doc?"

"Up on Wheeler Street. It's going like the dickens, and you'd better hurry. Worst one I've seen in this town. Hurry up. Wheeler Street—Malapo's stables."

He hung up. I slammed the receiver on the hook and turned to little Sam.

"Malapo's stables!" I said, and his eyes were fixed on mine. "Malapo's stables are on fire!"

Little Sam started.

"Malapo's—all those fine horses—"

Before he could say another word I hustled him out into the meeting room, and the singing stopped as soon as the boys saw my excited face.

"There's a big fire," I said to them. "Come on, let's go see it, but everybody stick together and use common sense."

Perry Stokes stayed to keep watch at the clubhouse, while we ran to the river path and up to the main road. Already there was a red flush in the sky that led us to the scene. The jangle of the fire engines mingled with the noisy hum that told us people from every section of the town were scampering out of their houses to take a look at the big blaze. We ran like the wind. I kept right alongside of Little Sam, and I heard his excited breathing as he put every ounce of strength into his running.

"This way," he panted, as he turned into a side street, and I knew he could lead the way to the stables better than anyone else, for he had been there with the Malapo boys that very afternoon. Just as we turned into Wheeler Street, now lighted up as bright as day,

there came a shout and we all scrambled to the sidewalk as a big horse came galloping past. He had a blanket upon his back and the blanket was blazing and the horse was mad with fright. We watched him as he plunged on toward the river, and then we started on again.

A great crowd was gathered around the stables when we came up. It was easy to see that the place could not be saved, and with the Little Samuel running at my side we swung around the edge of the crowd so that we could have a better look. The firemen were playing the hose on the blaze, and there was a great noise inside the stable, the neighing of the horses and the stamping of their hoofs as they plunged around. I turned in the excitement to see the rest of our bunch, but they had already become separated from us in the crowd.

"Come this way, Hawkins," called Little Sam, and I did not want to go farther, but he had got away from me and I wanted to be near him, so I followed. He steered clear of the crowd and got up on a little hill behind the stables, where we could look right down into the fire. Then we saw a man come running from the flames, holding his arm before his eyes, and when he neared us we saw that he was crying. He stopped there on the hill before us and, as if talking to himself, said:

"It's a shame! I can't get them out. They're all lost."

Little Samuel walked up to him and touched him on the arm.

"How many horses are in the stables, Mr. Malapo?" he asked.

The man shook him off impatiently, as he kept his gaze on the fire. Then, turning and seeing Little Sam, he stooped and patted the little fellow's head.

"I'm sorry, Sammy," he said. "I didn't know it was you. I been so worried. All my horses are in that fire—all but one, and he ran down the street with a blazing blanket—"

Little Sam didn't wait for more. He shot away from us like an arrow, and before I could shout at him he had sped down the hill.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Mr. Malapo. "He'll be killed sure as you're born. Stop him!"

I ran after him, but Little Samuel had too great a start. I saw him dart fifty yards ahead of me into the red haze behind the fire, and there I lost sight of him. A great crashing sound beyond the flames frightened me suddenly and made me turn swiftly and race back to the hill, where the owner of the stables stood. My heart was pounding against my shirt like a hammer. I was so excited I did not know what to think about. I couldn't even think. I was watching the firemen in front now as they took new positions away from the place where the wagon shed had caved in. Some men, who probably had seen Little Samuel dash into the red mist behind the stables, started to go after the boy, but the fire chief yelled at them to stand back.

"You can't help!" he cried. "Stand back for your lives! That whole roof will fall in a minute."

Oh, boy, how I watched that big bonfire! How my eyes burned for a sight of Little Samuel! How I wondered what the Judge and Doc Waters would say, now that I had let him get away from me. But it was in him, I guess. Once the fire fever is in a boy, it's hard to beat it out of him. Little Samuel liked a fire, and he wanted to be as close to it as he could get.

Then, suddenly, there came a cry from the crowd of people. The next instant there was a cheer, followed

by another cheer, and then a loud crash that could have been heard for miles away. The crowd began to surge to one side away from us, and with a startling cry the owner of the stables started running down the little hill and left me there alone. For a second I hesitated; then I ran to follow him.

For what I saw now was a string of horses running down the street, and stable men were running after them to head them off and put them in a place of safety. I ran to the rear of the fire, where Mr. Malapo was pushing his way through a ring of men. I got close behind him and followed through the path he made, until we stood within the circle. Little Sam was there, sitting astride a pony and talking to a big, burly policeman.

"I'll have to take you, sonny," the officer was saying.

"Not much you won't," said Mr. Malapo. "Boy, you saved my horses. Tell me, how'd you do it!"

"I knew Guy's pony was in there," said Little Sam, with a grin. "I sure wanted to save Guy's pony. That's the only one I could ride, anyhow. Those other ones are so big, and so I crawled under the chicken-pen door into the stable, you see, and say, I had some time getting on his back. The fire had 'im scared; it scares ponies awful. But I just got on his back and threw my coat over his head, and then I rode into every stall and unfastened the big ones that were tied, so I could coax 'em all out. Gee! I had to kick that great big one that went first, but after he went it seemed like the others knew they jus' had to foller him. Oh, boy! Never had so much excitement in my life—but ouch—it hurts—"

"Catch him!" called out a voice. The big, burly form of Doc Waters hurried up beside the policeman,

and arms were outstretched to catch the little form that slid off the pony and lay limp.

"He's burned!" said Doc sharply. "Take this pony away and make room."

They laid him on the coats of good-hearted men who had come to admire the bravery of the little kid. Doc ripped the sleeve from the boy's arm and bent over his medical bag for ointment.

"Only the arm," he said, "and not bad. Thank goodness!"

An hour later, in the clubhouse, after the story had been told again and again, the boys began to leave. Little Samuel, with his arm bandaged and hanging in a sling, was looking up at me with a grin on his impish little face.

"You said I was a coward, once," he said to me.

"I'll never say it again, Sam," I told him, "and I want you to forget that I ever said it."

He was silent for a few moments. Then:

"I'm through with fire," he said simply. He patted his bandaged arm and shook his head. "I never knew how awful it was till I got inside that hot stable. But I had to save those horses, didn't I, Hawkins?"

"You're a great guy, Sammy," I told him.

"And I come and tell you of my own free will," he said, "I tell you now, Hawkins, that I'm done with fire. No more for me. I never want to go into a hot place like that again, Seck. And I'm no coward, am I? No, sir. I'm glad I saved Guy's pony. You fellas will want to keep me in your club now."

Which we did.

V

A Fair Fist Fight

I AM writing this on Saturday night. You see, last Monday afternoon our bunch of boys met as usual in our little clubhouse on the river bank just as soon as school was out, and we held our regular meeting. After the roll call the dime-a-week dues were paid, and our captain, Dick Ferris, asked if anybody had anything to say.

"I have," spoke up Shadow Loomis, who was our spy, "and I guess you fellas will listen, when I tell you that the Pelham boys over the river are fixing something up on us."

"What do you mean?" asked our captain.

"They got a new fella over there," said Shadow. They're goin' to start something. We're goin' to finish it when they do."

"Hold on," I spoke up. "What's the use of talking yourselves into a fight? We want to be peaceful. Shadow, I'm surprised you'd bring a subject up like that. Let's talk about something else."

"Hawkins, I haven't had a chance to tell you what I know," said Shadow. "I know that Briggen is fixing something up on you. If you don't believe it, ask him; for if I'm not mistaken that's him and his gang on the porch right now."

We all turned around and looked out of the window. A shadow had fallen across the table, and we saw two or three Pelham fellows looking in each window. I got

up and opened the door. Briggen, the Pelham leader, was right in front.

"I'm sorry," I said sharply, "but we have a meeting going on just now and we can't be bothered. If you fellas are going somewhere, keep going, and walk fast."

I started to close the door, but Briggen shoved his big foot inside. If it was an ordinary foot I could have kicked it out. But Briggen's shoes look like flatboats, and it takes some tall kicking to kick his foot out of any place.

"Help me, Cheeky!" he yelled, when he saw that I was going to try to shove him back. And then there stepped up the broadest-shouldered boy I ever saw since Harkinson's time. He had light-yellow hair, and his head looked square, and his eyes were green as sure as I live.

With that strange appearance, he had me for a moment, long enough for him to shove his foot alongside of Briggen's, and between the two I'd have a hard time to tell which was the biggest, for the yellow-head wore broad-toe boots.

"Who are ya shovin'?" yelled the yellow-haired Cheeky. "Say, feller, do you want your face caved in?"

"Not yet," I shot back at him, for he made me mad. Golly! he made me mad. "Get out before I do something you'll be sorry for."

That must have made them both mad, for they shoved against the door as though they would force it in against me; but here's where Shadow came to my aid, and all the other boys followed him, and as they took the door from my hands, I doubled up my fist and sent it out with all the strength I had, and it caught the yellow-haired boy smack on the nose. And then before anything else could happen they withdrew their big

feet, and the door, being shoved from the inside by our boys, was slammed shut.

"Well," said our captain, "we started something, we did. Hawkins, you shouldn't have been so hasty with your fist."

"Hasty, my eye!" I exclaimed hotly, for I was mad. Golly! that yellow-haired kid made me mad. Every time I think of him yet I get mad. "Listen here, fellas," I said, "if those Pelhams don't go away from our clubhouse this minute, I want every one of you to follow me, and I'll go out there and lead the fight. We'll chase 'em away or get licked trying to."

"Now wait a minute," spoke up Johnny McLarren. "There's no use getting excited about this little thing—"

"Little thing, your neck!" hollered Jerry Moore. "Didn't you see how they were trying to break into our clubhouse?"

"Let's don't fight among ourselves," said Shadow Loomis. "Look. They are going away. They're down to the river bank already. See, they're getting into their boats. It's a good thing Hawkins slammed that big squarehead. So let's don't fight about it among ourselves."

Well, that brought all our boys around and settled it. But it wasn't a good thing that I punched Cheeky, as you shall see. It meant further trouble for me—trouble that I skinned out of only through luck; that, and the fact that in my earlier days I had learned something of the art of boxing.

. . . . . .

The Pelhams must have been thinking this thing out for days. Because it wasn't until Thursday that they came back again to our clubhouse. This time they did not try any rough stuff. They didn't shove their

big boots in our door. No. They tried to play high and mighty, and delivered a note. The trouble was we could hardly read the dern thing, because not one of the Pelhams can write worth a plugged nickel. Ham Gardner and Dave Burns were sent with the note. Ham tried to make an excuse when he handed it in, but I told Ham I didn't blame him. I knew it was all Briggen's doings. Briggen never did like me, ever since we've been on this river bank. He's just jealous because our club gets along so well.

"Well," I said, after Ham and Dave had gone back to their Pelham shore, "here's the ultimatum?"

"The what?" demanded our captain.

"Well," I said, "if you can read this scribbling you'll understand fast enough. I can hardly read it myself. Here, Shadow, you try it. Looks like a hen's scratching to me."

I threw the dirty paper over to Shadow Loomis. He picked it up and studied it a while. Then he began slowly:

"*To Hawkins and all others in the clubhouse, listen. You got to make good to Cheeky. Hawkins, you hit the wrong guy when you hit Cheeky, and you must fight him fair fist any time you say before Saturday, and believe me, you will be sorry you ever done anything to us Pelham fellas. Make your mind up before Saturday, or be a coward and stay so. Briggen.*"

Shadow looked up at our captain as if he expected him to say, "Throw that note in the wastebasket and pay no attention to it." But before that could happen I had a happy thought. I wasn't afraid of this Cheeky fellow.

"Wait!" I spoke up. "Perry Stokes will take my

answer back to Briggen right away. I won't write it. I wouldn't give them that much honor, fellas. I'll fight this yellow-haired fella on Saturday afternoon at two o'clock—"

"If you're willing to fight," spoke up Johnny McLarren, "why not make it to-morrow, so that we get it over with? No use spoiling Saturday."

"I'll not spoil your Saturday," I shot back at him. "I'll have it at two o'clock Saturday afternoon, Perry. Go over right away, and tell Briggen that's my answer to his note, and wait—tell him I think it's an impudent note at that. Don't forget that part of the message, Perry—impudent note."

Perry leaped out of the door to follow my orders. The boys began to ask me questions, but I paid no attention. And getting up, I went into my writing room and they followed. I sat down at my desk and took a few sheets of paper and cut them into little tickets, on which I wrote a few words.

"Here," I said to our captain. "These tickets will cost ten cents apiece. Give each boy twenty, and tell him to sell them to any boy in town who wants to see a real fight. It'll be Saturday afternoon at two. If I've got to fight that yellow-haired fella, we might as well make a little money out of it."

They were all a little surprised at the way I acted. But in the end each boy took some tickets and went out. I had an idea it would be a kind of a good fight, and that anybody who saw it would get ten cents' worth.

. . . . . .

I was surprised at the sight that met my eyes when I came down to the clubhouse to-day. I stayed away from the place all morning. I missed the meeting, just because I didn't want to act like I felt cocky about the

outcome of the fight, you see. I had Perry Stokes report to me about the meeting, so that I could write the minutes of it. But I stayed away until five minutes to two, and then I walked down the river path.

Well, the boys who call me their "seckatary" had taken care of everything. For the first time since the boxing match between Will Standish and Jerry Moore, they had got out the stakes and ropes to make the boxing ring. It was right in front of the clubhouse. There was sawdust all around the ring. And that wasn't all. There was a bunch of kids all around the ring. Kids from every part of our town, who had paid their ten cents for the ticket to see a regular fair fist fight. It was just like a championship fight. The yellow-haired Cheeky was already in the ring. Bill Darby hurried up to me as I came down the river path.

"Hurry up, you rummy!" he exclaimed. "They thought you were goin' to stay away, but I didn't, and neither did the rest of our gang. We got everything fixed, and a fine audience. Look at 'em."

"I have looked," I said. "I looked as I came down the path. You sold some tickets, it seems."

"I'll say we did," said Bill. "Johnny and I will be your seconds. Come on. The whitehead's got his gloves on already."

I followed him quickly, and as I climbed over the ropes there was a loud yell from all the boys, the strangers who made up our audience. I could see that the Pelhams didn't like this. They couldn't see why we had to make a show of it. The poor boobs! If they had only known that we had got ten cents from each one of those kids—oh, boy!

Everything had been prepared. There was a bell. As soon as Johnny McLarren had fastened my gloves

the bell rang. The fight was on. For the first time in two years I found myself on the defensive, with nothing to save me from a good beating but my fists; and believe me, that was the first time I noticed how big and strong Cheeky the yellow-haired looked to me. Oh, boy! I felt a funny feeling inside of me as I faced him, crouching, ready to spring at me and sock me a sleeper on the side of my head. But I wasn't going to allow that. No, sir. I had learned a few things about boxing. Will Standish and Harold Court had taught me the gentle art, and they were masters of it. I saw at once that Cheeky had also been coached, but somehow I felt from the very beginning that I was going to win. That means so much. If you think all the time that you are going to win, you just can't lose.

Cheeky swung a vicious left at my head. I ducked and came up with my left to his chin. He growled and backed away, snorting and shaking his head. He came on again. I danced back and away from him. I stood firm in my corner and swung my right like a windmill. He didn't know what to make of that. And while he was deciding, I let him have it smack on the chin again. Again he snorted, but this time he covered. He held his left in front of his chin. He forced me into my corner again and tried a jab at my right ear, but I caught it on my glove and grabbed him around the neck to save myself. They separated us, and again he forced me to my corner so swiftly that I didn't have time to think, and then I got it—smack on the nose, and I could feel the warm blood. Oh, boy! That made me wild. I rushed him. I don't know how I did it, but I rushed him and he went whirling back into his corner and stumbled over the water bucket that Briggen and Dave Burns, his seconds, had there. He almost sat down in

the water bucket, and it made me laugh so loud that I had to hold my sides; and believe, that's a bad thing to do, for he nearly caught me with my chin raised—if Bill Darby hadn't hollered.

Once more he squared off and started one of those funny slow movements that makes you wonder whether he's going to try something new. Then he flew into me, and before I could stop it his right caught me in the middle and took the wind clear out of me. Bill and Johnny caught me as I came backward, and Briggen and Dave Burns had enough human nature in 'em to understand it was a foul blow that wasn't allowed.

"It was an accident," I panted. "Let him go. We'll finish it."

Oh, boy! Finish it? I should say we would. I was so mad now that I knew—I just *knew* we would finish it. If Cheeky ever knew what that nasty punch had done for him, he'd make a pledge never to use it again. I was mad. Golly! he made me mad when he hit me that unfair crack. I took a long, deep breath and crouched like a panther. I feinted with my right, knowing all the time that my seldom-used left was gathering all the strength that a southpaw punch ever delivered. I let him have it square on the chin—always square on the chin, when you've got enough steam behind it, and he'll go down.

Cheeky went down.

"One—two—three—four—"

I heard 'em start counting, but I didn't hear 'em finish. Neither did Cheeky. He was dead to the world. But that wasn't the reason I didn't hear it. No. The reason I didn't get to hear 'em count ten was because our boys began to shout so and pick me up and put me on their shoulders and carry me away. The whole show

was broken up. The boys in the audience jumped up and ran behind us and shouted and cheered. Say, you would have thought it was a championship sure enough. I was breathing hard. I'm too fat to stand much of this kind of exercise, and I was glad when we reached the clubhouse.

"Good old Hawkins," whispered Lew Hunter, who seldom took part in our fights, but now he was helping Bill take the gloves off my hands. "You're wonderful, old top."

"Hawkins had the sense to put the right punch at the right time," Jerry Moore was saying.

"That's all right," Shadow Loomis said, shoving Jerry away. "I knew Hawkins could do it."

I felt weak as a cat. I wanted to know what our captain was doing.

"Where's Dick?" I asked, as I breathed hard for air. "Ain't he come back yet?"

"Oh, yes," said Shadow with a grin, "he's counting—"

"What!" I exclaimed. "Ain't they counted that yellow-haired guy out yet?"

"Fiddlesticks!" It was Shadow's favorite expression. "Dick's counting the dimes we collected for tickets."

And just at this moment Dick came up, a handful of tickets in his left and dimes in his right.

"Seventy-two tickets, fellas," he said. "Seven dollars and twenty cents."

"Put it in our treasury, Dick," I said feebly.

Which we did.

VI

Trouble Threatens

THE next day as I came down the path I stopped beside the evergreens and looked across the river. Something on the other bank caught my eye. It was a solitary boy, sitting with his legs crossed in the sand, his hands locked across his knees, staring at our clubhouse.

It was Cheeky.

"Well," I said to myself as I continued my way, "I don't know what you're lookin' at, old fella, but I hope you get an eyeful."

I went on into the clubhouse. All the boys were there waiting for me. Our captain, Dick Ferris, came up to me.

"Hawkins," he said, "did you see that yellow-haired guy across the river?"

"Of course I saw him," I said. "I guess you all did, too."

Shadow Loomis, with his usual smile, stepped up.

"Hawkins," he said, "that guy's been over there all day,"

I looked at Shadow with some surprise.

"How could you possibly know that?" I demanded. "Have you been down here all day?"

He nodded.

"I've been spying all day," he said. "Teacher's birthday. We had no school, so I thought the best way I could put in the day was to spy for our club. I followed that old bird down the river in a canoe." He

jerked his thumb across his shoulder, indicating the opposite shore.

"You shouldn't have spoiled your holiday," I told him. "If our teacher had a birthday, believe me, we wouldn't celebrate it like that—"

There came a pounding on the door. We all turned swiftly. Perry Stokes was about to open the door when Shadow held up his hand.

"Wait!" he said. Then, turning to me: "Hawkins, that's Cheeky. I knew as sure as shootin' that he'd come over. He wants to talk to you. Are you goin' to listen to him? Or do you want us to throw him out as soon as he steps in?"

I smiled.

"You know the answer," I said, and I walked back into my writing room. I kept one eye on the meeting room, that I could see through the half-parted curtains that separated it from my little office. Perry had opened the door. Cheeky stepped in.

"It's Hawkins I'm wantin' to see," he said.

The boys fell back on either side and let him advance. He stood within the curtains.

"Won't you come in?" I said, as politely as I could.

"Oh, I'll come in, all right," he said with a sneer. "You're struttin' your stuff now, you high-toned fatty—"

"Hold on!" I broke in. "Must we use such insulting things when we talk, Cheeky? Can't we do this thing nice and easy? Why make a fool of yourself? Try—I know it's hard for you to do it—but just try, once, anyhow, try to be a gentleman."

"Ha!" he cried. Then he laughed. Never did I hear a laugh like that—never before nor since. "You should tell me—"

"I'll tell you a few more things that'll be good for you," I said quietly as I struck my fat fist down upon the hand he had laid upon my desk. "I don't like you, Cheeky. Get that, will you?"

"I'll say the same for you," he said, grinning at me. And I don't know what, but there was something evil in that grin. For a minute I could not answer him. His leering face was close to mine and there was a malicious sparkle in his eyes. "You thought you beat me when you punched me in the jaw that time," he continued, referring to our fair fist fight with boxing gloves. "But you will have to answer for that, you smart ellick."

"Whenever you are ready," I said.

"Sure," he said, his voice shaking with his laughing. "So it shall be, my fine friend. Whenever I am ready. Good-by until that time. Until I am ready. Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha!"

I saw all my boys crouching as if to spring upon the bully. But as he turned they straightened up. Now, I don't know what it is, but there is something about a boy like Cheeky that makes another fella straighten up. As soon as Cheeky turned toward the door they all straightened up—even Shadow. Cheeky, still laughing his mocking laugh, his hands upon his waist, swaggered through the lines to the door, where he turned and, looking at the other boys, he pointed his finger at me:

"Take that boy out of your club!" he shouted. "Take him out, and rest easy. Or else beware of the Scorpions."

Then he was gone. For two or three minutes there was a silence in the clubhouse—a silence during which you could have heard a pin drop. Then, like a flash Shadow turned to me:

"Hawkins, I told you. I knew it. He hates you—"

"No matter," I broke in quietly. "I hate him—"

"But he has a gang behind him—"

"Haven't I a gang behind me? Aren't you all going to stick to me through this thing?"

"See here," spoke up Lew Hunter, "aren't we ever going to be through with fights and all rough stuff?"

"Not as long as Hawkins is in danger," said Shadow Loomis quietly. "I'm going to stick to Hawkins. I'll see him through this thing."

"So will I," said Dick Ferris, our captain.

"But," spoke up Jerry Moore, "if this Cheeky means what he says—"

"Stop right there!" put in Robby Hood. "I live in Watertown. I'd like to see Cheeky or any other boy from my own town tell me that my club was afraid of his gang."

"Boys," I said, "you all know how this thing started. I didn't try to get into a fight with this Cheeky fella. But now I'm in it, and it looks like I'll need help—"

"Don't talk like that, Hawkins," said our captain. "They've got to help you. Now I say this, and I'm captain and you got to obey my orders: Any fella who doesn't want to stand by Hawkins doesn't have to. All you have to do is to leave this clubhouse right away, and come back after this trouble with Cheeky is settled, but not before."

"Hello, poys."

A new voice had rung into the conversation. Old Hiram stood in the doorway.

"Hiram!" shouted the fellas all together.

"Yah, der Doktor Waters, he tell me kom here and say gif you a turkey for T'anksgiffing. He say I should

ax you to kom and pick out der turkey, and den I kill it and take de fedders off, so you—"

"Hold on, Hiram," said our captain, holding up his hand. Then, turning to us boys, he continued: "Doc Waters told Hiram to fix a turkey for us to roast on our camp fire Thanksgiving Day. It's gonna be lots of fun, but if we split upon this Cheeky's trouble, Thanksgiving Day will be spoilt. I don't want to coax anybody, but if everybody in this club is for seeing things go off smoothly, helping one another and standing by our friend Hawkins, let's all show it by going along with Hiram now and 'tending to this turkey business."

Which we did.

VII

The Scarecrow

SNOW fell to-day, the first time this winter, and so it was hard to keep the boys in for the meeting. Our captain cut it short so that all the boys could go out and play while the snow was coming down.

Shadow Loomis stayed with me after the other boys went out. I could tell by the restless way he walked up and down that he was anxious to talk. So I said to him:

"Well, Shadow, you might as well tell me what you've got on your mind, and then go out and play with the fellas. I've got to write the minutes before I do anything else."

"I just wanted to know if you're going down to the cornfield," said Shadow. "You said yesterday that we would both go."

"Of course we are going," I said. "You come back in fifteen minutes and I'll be ready. By the way, Little Sam wasn't at our meeting to-day. See if you can find him. I think we ought to take him with us."

Shadow said no more and went out. Perry Stokes, who was cleaning up the meeting room, came in.

"Can't I go, too, sir?" he asked.

"Perry," I said, "we are only going down to the cornfield, where Cheeky and his gang hold their meetings—"

"But Cheeky has sworn to get even with you, Hawkins," cut in Perry. "He is a tough customer, and I think you should be careful, sir."

"I'll be careful, all right," I told him. "Cheeky's got some business with Guy Malapo and his brother

Stanley. Little Sam's mixed up in it, too. Shadow and I think it's best that we spy a little and find out what it's all about. The Malapo boys are going to give Cheeky a Chinese coin and he's going to give 'em a dollar for it. We are just going to look on and find out why they are doing this. That's all. We won't let 'em see us, and we'll be back without them ever knowing we were near. You'd better stay here, Perry."

"I wish you'd let me go along, Hawkins," he pleaded.

"Oh, all right," I said, turning to my writing, "you can go. Be quiet now till I finish my writing."

Shadow came back in fifteen minutes and reported that Little Sam had not been seen around the river bank all day. We decided to start at once, because it gets dark so early these days. Perry Stokes had the long green canoe ready when we reached the river bank, and we lost no time hopping in. Shadow and Perry took up the oars, and away we went up the river.

The river makes a little backwater in the old gully, and there we landed and pulled up the canoe. Shadow then led the way through the dried grass and stickers that took us at last to that wide sloping cornfield, where the gang of Cheeky's Scorpions held their councils.

It was an untidy cornfield. It had been neglected, in the first place, and then the meetings of Cheeky's gang every day hadn't done it any good. There was still an old scarecrow flapping in the wind. The part of the field that sloped into the gully was still in corn, but the rest of the field was cut and in shocks. Pumpkins lay here and there. Beyond we could see a thin ribbon of smoke floating from some camp fire.

As soon as we came in sight of the camp fire we saw that the meeting of Cheeky's gang was already started. Shadow told Perry to stay behind the farthest corn

A Sound Caused Him To Turn Around, And
He Saw Guy And Stan Malapo Coming
To Meet Him

shock, and we took our positions closer up. The ring of boys around Cheeky's camp fire looked up once or twice as though they heard us. But they couldn't see us, so they turned back to their talk around the fire.

Cheeky himself sat like a gloomy statue, staring into the fire with a sullen face. A sound caused him to turn around, and he saw Guy and Stan Malapo coming to meet him.

"Well," he said, "have you got it this time?"

Guy Malapo nodded. He reached into his pocket and pulled out his hand and offered it to Cheeky. Cheeky took the thing and turned it to the light of the fire, and there was a grin on his face.

"Fine boy!" he exclaimed, looking up at Guy. "Good-by."

But Guy didn't say good-by to him. No. He folded his arms and stayed where he was.

"We made a bargain," he said. "You get the Chinese coin and we get a silver dollar. And I'm goin' t' stay here till I get it."

Cheeky laughed.

"Brave buddy!" he exclaimed. "You make me feel proud of you. But you don't seem to get the drift—see? All we wanted is this coin. We're gettin' it for a man who wants it bad—likes Chinese coins. All we aimed to do was to get it—see? We got it, and we don't pay for anything we got. You should have made us pay you the dollar before you give up the Chinese piece—see?"

Guy Malapo looked angry.

"You can't get away with that," he said so quietly that I barely heard his words. "We played square with you. You are trying a cheating game. But you can't get away with it."

Cheeky's grin faded from his face. He scowled.

"We do as we please," he said. "Look here." He waved his hand around the circle of watching faces. "Think you'd have any chance?"

"I don't know," said Guy sharply, "but we can find out quick enough."

He drew back his right arm and leaped forward. His fist shot out and caught Cheeky upon the nose. The bully bellowed and his gang leaped to their feet and came to his aid.

"Run, Stan!" yelled Guy Malapo to his brother. And Stan stood as though petrified.

"I'll stick," he said, doubling up his fists; but his brother, backing away from the gang, motioned for him to get while the getting was good.

"You can't help me, Stan!" he cried. "No use. Get out quick. Run, I tell you!"

Stan hesitated ho longer, but turned and ran down the gully. By this time they were mauling Guy. Cheeky had his arm around him and the rest of the gang crowded upon them. That was more than I could stand. I forgot my own safety as I rushed out of my hiding place.

"Let that boy alone!" I cried, as I ran upon them. But I saw the foolishness of it before I had gone far. Shadow and Perry had followed me, and now the three of us stood stock-still as Cheeky's gang faced us. Before they could start after us, my common sense came back to me, and I saw how foolish it would be for us to tackle this crowd. We couldn't do anything but get a good beating. Nothing would be gained. I turned.

"Go back!" I shouted to Shadow and Perry. "Run like the dickens and get all our boys." We started. But Cheeky's Scorpions were coming after us. Shadow and Perry ran faster than I did, because I am too fat to

be a racer. And then my foot caught in a pumpkin vine and down I went flat on my stomach, and it knocked the wind out of me. It seemed that the Scorpions were upon me in a moment. How they yelled and kidded me! Oh, boy! it made me mad. But what could I do?

They took me back to the camp fire. The rest of the gang had taken their seats around the fire. I looked for Guy Malapo, and saw him tied to a fence post. His cap was gone and his head hung upon his chest. Cheeky grinned as they brought me up to the fire.

"Ha!" he cried. "Our friend Hawkins! Lucky day for us. Was wonderin' how we could get hold of you. We figgered as how we'd ha' to go and get you, but you come by yourself and save us all the trouble. Much obliged."

An ugly-looking kid rose slowly from his place by the fire. He came close and looked into my face.

"Get away from him, Spider," called Cheeky. "I'll 'tend to him. He's my meat. I got something to pay him back for. I been waiting for this."

He shoved the ugly kid away and came close up to me, grinning into my face. I would have punched him for that mocking grin, but my hands were held by the boys who had caught me. Cheeky raised his arm and slapped me with the flat of his hand across my cheek. Oh, boy! it made me mad.

"Think you're smart, don't you?" he laughed. And then his left hand struck me. It made me boil. But I couldn't budge. "I told you I'd get even with you, you smart ellick. And that ain't all. You got something worse coming to you. You're in bad, fella. You don't know just how bad you're in, but wait. Here, fellas, got some more of that rope?"

They brought out some more rope and tied me to

the post next to that on which Guy Malapo hung. They tied me well, believe me; so tight that the ropes burned my wrists and ankles. Cheeky tried all the ropes to see if they would hold.

"Now then," he sang out, "we promised a certain fella we would get a coin for him to-day, and we promised him to get you later. But now we've got the coin and you, so I'll leave the coin with you, and he'll be along directly and take you. Here y'are."

He dropped the Chinese coin into my pocket. At this the ugly kid whom they called Spider stepped up.

"What's a-matter, Cheek?" he said. "Ain't we gonna wait till the Big Noise comes and pays us for our work?"

"You dumbhead!" exclaimed Cheeky, turning. "Do you want to stay here and get caught? Don't you know Hawkins had some fellas with him, and this Malapo guy had his brother? How long do you think it'll be till they bring back the sheriff and a crowd? No. Come on. Let's get a start. The Old Boy'll be along by hisself soon, and believe me, he'll take care o' Hawkins."

They started then. Spider led them, and they all fell into a dogtrot and went down across the gully. Cheeky stayed just long enough to give me a swipe across the face with his flat hand. Then he ran, laughing. But I made up my mind right there and then that some day Cheeky would get back every unfair blow he gave me—and with interest.

Their footsteps died out. I wondered how long it would be until Shadow brought back the boys. I wondered whom they had meant by the "Big Noise" and the "Old Boy," who, they said, would come to get me and the coin. My eyes wandered from Guy Malapo's limp form to the desolate cornfield all about. The old scarecrow still flapped its ragged coat sleeves, and the

old shabby hat seemed to slide off. Suddenly it shook as if a heavy wind had struck it. The next instant I saw the whole scarecrow topple over and fall upon the ground. And no sooner had it struck the ground when a small figure rose from the wreckage. By golly! it was little Sam Burnham.

"Don't worry, Hawkins," he called to me as he ran. "I'll have you out o' that in a jiffy."

"Where in the world did you come from, Sammy?" I asked. "We missed you at the meeting to-day."

"Yeah, I couldn't come to the meeting," he answered, as he opened his pocket knife and began sawing away at the ropes around my ankles. "I had to fix myself up in that old scarecrow so's I could spy on this bad bunch of loafers. I never expected this to happen, but gee! I'm glad I was here."

"So am I!" I exclaimed heartily, as the last ropes were cut and I stood aside and stretched my limbs. "Sammy, you're a brick. Were you hiding in that scarecrow all the time?"

"Sure!" he said with a little laugh. "I had to get in there before they came, you see. That's why I couldn't come to the meeting. I bet you won't let 'em fine me for not being there, will you?"

"I should say I won't!" I said warmly. "I think the boys ought to give you a gold medal—"

"Please help me out of this."

We turned at the sound of the voice and saw poor Guy Malapo looking at us. We rushed to unfasten him, and Little Sam said:

"Quick now. We mustn't stay here any longer. Somebody's coming who will be very mean to you, Hawkins. I heard 'em talking about it while I was playing scarecrow. It's somebody they are working for.

All Cheeky's gang is working for him. Let's get away from here quick."

Together the three of us went forward, Sammy and I holding Guy between us, for he had got a very bad beating and was very weak. We hadn't gone far before we heard our boys coming. I knew they would come, but they were too late to help. At the last corn shock we met them, and I told them all that had happened. Oh, boy! Maybe you think they weren't mad when they heard what happened.

"Hold on!" exclaimed Shadow Loomis, gazing down into the cornfield where we had been tied. "Perhaps that is the fella they tied you up for, Hawkins. Be careful, everybody."

We turned our eyes upon the cornfield. It was growing dark swiftly now. But in the gloomy shadows I could see a tall, thin shape moving—a man's shape, with a flat hat and a long overcoat. He was standing beside the camp fire. He looked down around the stones on which the boys in Cheeky's gang had sat. He stooped and picked up a piece of paper. He read it and turned to look at the fence posts. Perhaps Cheeky had told him in that note that he would find me tied to the fence post and the Chinese coin in my pocket. But Cheeky had forgotten the scarcrow.

The tall, thin man walked slowly past the posts. Then he paused and looked all around. He could not see us, even if it had been broad daylight, because we were huddled behind the shock. But he came up as though he had seen us. He was heading straight for us, it seemed, and we all crouched lower. His footsteps sounded nearer, and we held our breath. But the footsteps didn't stop. He passed right by us, his shoulders bent. But just as he was passing into the gloom of the

trees on the edge of the field he turned to look around and I got a glimpse of his face—and I started.

"Mui Fong!" I exclaimed under my breath. But then the Chinaman disappeared in the darkness.

"Great guns!" exclaimed Shadow Loomis as he looked at me. "It's the old Chinaman, Hawkins."

"I saw," I said, nodding my head. Then I shoved over to Little Sam and took his hand and shook it. "Sammy," I said, "you don't know what a good turn you've done me to-day. Believe me, I think you saved my life. If that old Chinaman had ever got his hands on me—"

"Hawkins," spoke up our captain, "do you know what this all means?"

"It means," I said, "that Cheeky's gang is working with Mui Fong, and that they promised to catch me for him."

"That's right," spoke up Little Sam. "I heard 'em talkin' that all over while I was hidin' in the scarecrow. You know, Hawkins, we ought to go right up and tell the sheriff about this."

Which we did.

VIII

The Chinese Coin

BELIEVE me, I took a great liking to Little Sam, after the way he saved me from falling into the hands of Mui Fong. And he took a liking to me, too. He hung around me every day after school, and when I asked him why he didn't go out and play with the other boys, he said: "I gotta keep an eye on you. No tellin' when that Chinaman will pop up and try to git you."

Perry Stokes didn't like that at all. Perry's been a sort of lieutenant to me, always keeping me informed as to anything that happens while I am away and helpme out every time there is work to do. I guess Perry figured he could do all the watching that was necessary, and now when Little Sam was making a hero of himself every time he had a chance, Perry felt that the time had come when he would be shoved into the background.

"Hawkins," he said to me, when we were alone for a few minutes, "ain't I overseer of this clubhouse?"

"You sure are, Perry," I said with a laugh. "Nobody says you ain't."

"And didn't I always do my work—clean up the clubroom, and everything, sir?"

"You did all that, and well, too."

"Then it ain't really necessary, sir, to have another boy look after you, is it?"

I had to laugh.

"Perry," I said, "you've been true blue ever since

I've known you. And you've done me many a good turn, too, that I'll never forget. But you've got the wrong idea. I don't need anybody to look after me—see? You mean well, Perry, and I thank you for it, but believe me, I can take care of myself."

"But Mui Fong is a dangerous Chinaman, sir," said Perry. "The detective Jeckerson told you that, and he knows. And he will come right up here to the clubhouse and get you, sir."

"No," I said, "I don't think he will. If he had something to get besides me, I might believe the old Chinaman would come up here and try to get it. But I hardly think he will. He knows our sheriff and Jeckerson are watching for him. If he comes around here he knows that he is likely to get caught."

"But he can watch for a chance, sir," said Perry eagerly, leaning forward over the desk. "That's just it, sir. He'll try anything to get what he wants."

"No, I don't think you're right there. He won't come for me. He knows he couldn't take me, that's all. If he had anything else to get—"

"He has, sir!"

"What could he want?"

"The Chinese coin!"

I stood stock-still. I had never thought of that. I slowly put my hand into my pocket. Sure enough, the Chinese coin was there. The piece of Chinese money that Cheeky had promised to give Guy Malapo a dollar for—it was still in my pocket. Like a flash came back to me that scene in the cornfield, when Guy Malapo brought the Chinese coin to exchange for a dollar, as Cheeky had promised. Once again I could see the big bully reaching his hand out, Guy giving the Chinese piece, and then being told by Cheeky that now, since

he had the Chinese coin in his possession, he would not live up to his bargain.

"He put it in my pocket, after he had tied me to the fence post," I said, half to myself.

"Yes," said Perry, "but he didn't expect you'd be able to keep it. He figured as how the Chinaman, Mui Fong, would come along and take you, and he left a note telling Mui Fong that he would find the coin in your pocket."

"Which he would if Little Sam hadn't come along in time to cut the ropes and set me free," I said.

Perry frowned. He didn't like to have Little Sam brought into it. Little Sam was assuming too much of Perry's place to suit Perry.

"Well, sir," he said, "Mui Fong didn't get the coin. You have it there in your hand. I have a notion, sir, that it is a very valuable coin. Otherwise there would not be so much fuss over it. But at any rate, you have it, and as long as you've got it, sir, you are in danger. Believe me, sir, it will be called for."

I hesitated only a moment, while I quickly thought over the situation. Then I exclaimed:

"Go out and find Little Sam at once. Tell him I must talk to him as soon as possible. By Jinks, Perry! you probably saved me a lot of trouble."

"Yes, sir, thank you, sir!" said Perry, as he turned and went out.

I was nervous. I walked up and down my little writing room. I tried to sit down and write once, but I got up again and started walking. I wished Perry would hurry and bring Little Sam back so that I could tell him to get Guy Malapo. I wanted to talk to Guy. I wanted to get rid of this Chinese coin. It seemed to me that it was an unlucky piece of money to carry

around. I wanted to be shed of it as soon as I could, but I wanted to know that it went where it belonged, so that no more trouble would come to me about it.

It seemed warm in the clubhouse. I shoved open the window beside my desk and stood peering out. It was growing dark. The air was crisp and fresh and it felt good on my face. I stood before the open window and looked out. The deserted river path stretched away before my eyes, a regular aisle of evergreens that seemed to dare the wintry weather to turn their color. Not a soul in sight. Not a sound to be heard. I wondered where all our boys could be. I wondered whether or not I would have more trouble on account of this bad-luck coin I had in my keeping. I thought about the old fairy tales I used to read. Surely none was ever more fantastic than the things that were happening around this old river bank on account of this old Chinese nickel. It seemed to be burning a hole in my pocket. I took it out and looked at it. It was a little larger than a nickel. It had a brassy border. The rest of it was of a dirty brown color. It had a square hole in the center and on each side of the hole was a Chinese character. One side of the hole had been nicked. And just as I noticed that, something caused me to look, and I saw a hand reach up from beneath the open window—reach up and snatch the coin from my fingers before I had time to know what was going on.

The hand disappeared. I shouted and leaned out of the window, but it was too dark to see now. Night had fallen. The shadows of the river bank fell thickly all around the clubhouse. The glare of the lamp on my desk blinded my eyes to the dark outside. I shouted again as I turned toward the meeting room to run out. But I knew that whoever it was that had taken the

Chinese coin from me I would never find out; I just knew it.

I swung the door wide and leaped upon the porch. I shouted, hallooed to the boys, who, I imagined, were somewhere near. But not a sound came. Fright suddenly took hold of me. The deserted place seemed to chill me. I shivered and backed inside, slamming the door shut and bolting it tight. I ran back into my writing room and slammed the window shut.

Then I sat down in front of my desk and slumped forward in my chair. I felt dazed. With all I had gone through, it was enough to make any fellow feel funny. I didn't know what was coming off. Naturally you would imagine that the one who took the coin from my fingers was either Cheeky or Mui Fong himself. But supposing it hadn't been—

There came a tapping at the door, a light tapping, as if somebody outside wanted to get in without causing much notice.

"Who's there?" I called out, for I didn't want to be caught napping now, when any of my enemies might catch me alone. How I wished for my pals then! Oh, boy! you don't know what it is to feel like that till you go through something like it.

"It's me, sir," came Perry Stokes' voice. "I've brought 'em with me, sir."

Oh, boy! What a relief to hear good old Perry's voice! I made up my mind right then and there that no matter what happened, Perry Stokes was to be my right bower from now on, world without end. I hurried to the door and flung it open. Perry stood there, with three others—Little Sam and both of the Malapo boys, Guy and Stan.

"Come in," I said. "And believe me, I'm glad to

see somebody. Honest, I believe I'd be glad to see Old Nick himself right now."

"I found them together, sir," said Perry Stokes. "They were coming down the river path from the main road. I told Little Sammy that you wanted him, sir."

I nodded.

"And I'm glad he brought his friends with him," I said, "because I wanted to tell him to bring them here. That's why I sent for you, Sammy. I wanted you to tell your friends there, the Malapo boys, that I wanted to see them."

"We are always glad to oblige," said Guy Malapo, with an oily smile. "May we be of some service to you?"

"No," I said sharply, "but I may be to you, fella. Seems to me you're mighty carefree. If I were you I would kind-a watch my step."

"What do you mean?" demanded Guy Malapo, stepping up to me. "Look here, I'm not used to being talked to like this—"

"Guy!" broke in Stan, his brother, "Guy! What's the use of—"

"Shut your trap!" snapped Guy Malapo. I'm big enough to take care of myself—"

"Are you?" I cut in.

"You bet I am," he said quickly, "and if you'll please say what you—"

"For the love of Mike!" broke in Little Sammy. "Say, what do you think this is? Where you think I brung you, huh? If you want to start a fight, what you come here for? Say, this is my new club. You don't have to get sore—"

"Well, I am not here for my own pleasure," broke in Guy Malapo. "I talk to these boys, Sammy, just because you want me to. Else—"

"This is a fine club," protested Perry Stokes. I knew Perry would get riled up in a minute. I was just watching for it. "Listen, boy, you don't know—"

"I know more than you ever will learn," Guy Malapo cut him sharply. "Let's get this comedy over with. What's the big idea? Why are we here?"

I grabbed him by the lapel of his coat.

"You are here," I said, "because I sent for you. Get that?"

"If I don't?"

"You'd better. Now you listen to me, funny guy. I sent for you, Guy Malapo, because I've got something to say to you."

"Oh, you have, eh?"

"I have, eh. And I don't mind adding this, too: that if you ever get into such a fix as we found you in last week, it's dollars to doughnut holes that we won't move a hand to save you. Understand me, kid?"

He laughed at me. He snapped his fingers.

"You make so much to do about this miserable clubhouse of yours—"

"Stop it!" I said savagely, for he had made me mad. Oh, boy! he made me mad. "Now look here, Guy Malapo. I didn't think you were such a fella. I figured you were a good scout. We helped you out of a bad fix last week. You seem to have forgotten that. I only wanted you down here because I wanted to straighten things out—give you back what belonged to you—to save you from something that you might not know would happen—"

"All right, smart boy," broke in Guy Malapo, before I could finish. "I know what you are trying to say. You want to give back to me the Chinese coin. All right, even though it has been a piece of bad luck, I'll

take it. Hand it over, and let's be through with this fussing."

I backed away to my desk. I could see that all the other boys expected me to do what Guy Malapo had asked me to. But I couldn't.

"I haven't got it," I said slowly. "The Chinese coin—it was stolen—snatched from my hand—through that window—there—"

"Who took it?" demanded Guy Malapo, in a high-pitched voice.

"I don't know," I answered. "It was too dark for me to see. It happened too suddenly. I don't know who's got it."

I turned my face away from them. I gazed out of the foggy window into the gloom. The mocking laugh of Guy Malapo broke the stillness.

"Ha-ha!" he laughed. And then he turned toward the boys gathered around him. "Well," he said, "it seems to me that since your Seckatary lost that which belonged to us, it's up to you boys to find the one who stole it."

Which we did.

IX

"The Spider"

THE Chinese coin certainly had proved a piece of bad luck to me. It seemed that those who really wanted the coin could never get hold of it, but it passed from hand to hand among a great many who didn't want it, and believe me, I was one who wanted it less than any. It was forced on me, you might say; anyway, I had never asked for it. Every time I thought of the way I had come in possession of that strange piece of money I was worried. Seems like a fellow can't keep bad luck away; it just comes and hangs itself on a person. So it was with that coin. And whoever it was that snatched it from my hands through the open window, he was no friend of mine. He got me into trouble right.

"You simply must get it back." It was Jeckerson who spoke, sitting in a chair across from me. He had come down to the clubhouse to warn me, he said. But I think he came to find out something for himself. He was always using me to help him solve one of his cases.

"I know," I said, "I simply must get it back, but how am I to go about it?"

"You've got to figure that out yourself," he said, getting up. "Remember, Hawkins, I am giving you this for your own good. For some reason or other the Chinaman wants that coin. And whenever he wants anything, he stops at nothing to get it. You know as well as I do that your worst enemy, Cheeky and all his gang, are doing what the Chinaman tells them to do.

Mui Fong has 'em all under his thumb. They are being paid by the Chinaman. And from what I can gather, Cheeky is a very bad boy, who really belongs up in the School for Bad Boys. I aim to put him there when I have the Chinaman safe behind prison walls again."

I shook my head.

"I want to do the right thing, Jeckerson," I told him. "I don't want fights with Cheeky and his gang. I don't want fights with anybody. I'd live peaceful if everybody would let me alone. But this Cheeky gang is new to me. I don't know a single boy in his gang."

"I can tell you this much," broke in Jeckerson. "Cheeky's Scorpions—that's the name he has given his ragamuffins—they have had some quarrel among themselves. It was about this very same coin. And Cheeky, it seems, feared a boy called 'The Spider'—"

"I know him," I broke in. "He's that ugly cuss that sneered at me when they had me tied up for the Chinaman. I'm going to get even with him some day."

Jeckerson laughed.

"You'd better let him alone," he said. "The Spider evidently is the evil genius of the whole crew. He's so bad, they tell me—"

"Who told you all this?"

"I've had my deputies on this case for a month. They found out that this 'Spider' kid belongs in Chinatown; in fact, is supposed to be a Chinese boy. He it was who first got Cheeky to work for Miu Fong. His one peculiarity is his hands. His fingers are long and crooked, with very long finger nails. I should imagine you would be frightened to meet him on the river path alone on a dark night."

"I've run up against some things that would scare me just as much," I told him. "But what was it you

wanted to say about the quarrel among Cheeky's gang?"

"Cheeky and 'Spider' had a fuss. What this great to-do about the Chinese coin happens to be is more than I can tell. But the Spider has left Cheeky's gang, and that's the one big thing I'm down here to tell you. There is a reward of twenty dollars for his capture. Old Squire Hornaby offered it after he heard about this business. They figure if they can get the Spider, he will tell all he knows about Mui Fong—his hiding place. And after that it will be easy sailing for my department."

"So you want me to be on the lookout for the Spider—"

"And catch him if you can. Phone me as soon as you nab him."

I threw up my hands at this.

"Not me," I said. "Listen, Jeckerson. I've been doing lots o' things for you, and I'm glad if I have helped you any. But I ain't hankerin' for this sort of thing, you know. Seems like you are trying to bring me up a detective. Excuse me, please. Not this time. Get somebody else."

Jeckerson placed both hands on my desk and leaned over toward me.

"You've got to do this," he said; "you've got to, for your own sake. You've got to be on your guard, boy, more than ever in your life. I tried to tell your daddy that, but, like all proud fathers, he's got a lot more confidence in what you can do than I would have if you were my boy. Understand?"

"No," I said, "I don't understand. What difference does it make whether I'm your boy or somebody else's? You seem to have a lot of confidence in me since I'm not your boy."

Jeckerson straightened up and shook his head impatiently.

"I don't mean that," he said. "I mean, if I had a son I wouldn't let him take the risks that your daddy lets you run. I wouldn't take a chance."

"My daddy ain't taking any chance," I told him. "My daddy knows I can take care of myself, that's all. He knows what he taught me when I was a little kid. He knows I'll never forget to use common sense, to look before I take a jump, and to do the right thing or nothing at all."

Jeckerson walked to the door.

"All right," he said with a grin, "you've heard all I have to say, so I might as well be going. You know where I am. You've got a phone on your desk. Let me know when that twenty-dollar reward belongs to you."

"Don't hold your breath for that!" I shouted back at him as he walked out through the meeting room. I heard the door slam behind him.

To show you how lucky it is for us to do something when we really have no idea what it will mean to us later on, I must write down here what happened to me two days before Christmas. My Aunt Julia sent me a Christmas gift. It was a pretty necktie, black and red slanting stripes, and oh! silky and fine. She knows I like to hang out down at our clubhouse, so she just addressed it to "Seckatary Hawkins, care of the clubhouse," and it was brought down by the mail man just as we were holding our meeting. Of course, I had to open it up and show it to all the boys, and Shadow Loomis said I wasn't game if I didn't put it right on and wear it. Which I did.

I had told every boy in the club about my troubles,

and what Jeckerson had said about Mui Fong and Cheeky and the Spider all quarreling among themselves about the Chinese coin, and that if I couldn't produce that coin when I was called upon, believe me, something would happen. So every one of the fellows who was good at spy work was out every day scouring the woods for signs of our enemies. Nothing came of it until the evening of that very day, when Shadow burst in upon me with this:

"Get up, Hawkins. You've got to come along with me. I found out something.

"What?" I asked. "Has it something to do with the Chinese coin?"

"It has," he said, "but if you don't hurry, you might not get a chance to see him?"

"See who?" I asked, as I slipped into my coat and clapped my cap upon my head. But Shadow grabbed my arm and drew me out, and together we ran down the river path to the little landing, where a canoe was waiting. I knew Shadow well enough not to talk further. It was growing dark and beginning to snow. Shadow paddled swiftly across the stream, landing right at the Pelham shore. We ran together up the bank, he leading me toward the woods beyond Pelham. And among the trees I could see as we ran the red glow of a camp fire. We came upon it in five minutes. A solitary figure sat beside the blaze.

"I'll stay here and watch for his pals," whispered Shadow. "You go ahead and talk to him. "He's one of Cheeky's gang. I know it."

I fell upon my hands and knees and crept forward until I was a few feet behind him. He began to hum a queer tune. I crept another foot, but some movement he made brought me to a stop. He reached into his

sweater pocket and brought forth an object. He turned it to the light of the fire and studied it. I crept another foot and—by Jinks! the object that he held was the very Chinese coin that had been snatched from my hand through the clubhouse window! I crept another foot and paused. He began to flip the coin into the air, catching it as it came down and sending it back up. If I could only snatch it from him—serve him as he had served me. I determined to try. I got another foot closer—right behind him now. I waited until he flipped it into the air again. I reached out to snatch it from him as he sent it up again—but he suddenly shoved it back into his pocket and folded his hands across his knees. And then he looked around.

"Ah-ho!" he cried in alarm. "Who are you? What you want?"

"I want that coin," I told him, "that piece of money you were just playing with. Hand it over, and be quick about it."

He leaped to his feet. As he did so he brought up with him a long stick, on the end of which, tied with twine, was a long-bladed knife, the edge of which gleamed, newly sharpened, in the firelight.

"No," he said, "nobody takes what I have. I warn you, take care. I do not wish to harm you, but I will protect myself. This knife is dangerously sharp. Who are you?"

Before I could answer, he dropped the spear he held and walked over close to me. He stood gazing at me. I wondered if he had recognized me. I thought he was staring at my face, but he wasn't.

"Well," I said, "I want that coin you have. I simply must have it. Not that I want it myself, but it belongs to somebody to whom I must return it."

"HE BEGAN TO FLIP THE COIN INTO THE AIR,— IF I COULD ONLY SNATCH IT FROM HIM —"

He raised his beetle eyes to mine swiftly. Then only did I realize what he had been looking at so intently.

"That!" he exclaimed, pointing to my new necktie. "Give me that, and you shall have the coin."

You never saw anybody take off a necktie as quickly as I did that one. I felt a little regretful that Aunt Julia's gift should be lost so soon, but if Aunt Julia had known how much the coin meant to me——

"Here," I said, holding it out. "Now the coin—quick."

He passed over the coin and took the necktie. I pocketed the coin. My eyes fell upon his hands—his fingers. They were long and crooked, and the finger nails were three inches long—like twisted hooks.

"Shadow!" I yelled. "Shadow! Come here quick!"

"No," he said fiercely, for it was the "Spider" himself with whom I was dealing. "You shall not do this." He sprang back, thrusting into his sweater pocket the crumpled necktie and snatching up his long, spear-like weapon. He pointed it toward me as I started for him. "You wait here," he continued, "until I get a start."

With that, then, he turned suddenly and, like a deer, sped away. He was swallowed up in the dark beyond the trees before Shadow, in answer to my call, ran up into the faint glow of the dying camp fire.

"Quick, Shadow," I said, "it was the 'Spider.' Jeckerson will give us twenty dollars if we capture him. Come on!"

Shadow came on, and we traveled fast, but we finally gave up, because I am too fat to run far and I get out of breath so soon.

"Let's go back," I said. "We will see the 'Spider' again some day."

Which we did.

X

A Vagabond's Supper

THE bad-luck coin had come back to me. I don't believe in being superstitious, but it certainly seemed to me that the Chinese coin with a hole in the middle had brought bad luck to me. Not only to me, but to every one that had ever had it. Guy Malapo had to take a good beating from Cheeky's gang for having the coin in his pocket. Cheeky and his queer pal, whom we called the Spider, had a quarrel over it and were on the outs, and it certainly brought enough worry to me.

On Friday after school was out we met as usual in our clubhouse on the river bank. Doc Waters came to our meeting, and said old Judge Granbery was sore at us again, and I said, "For the love of Mike, what's he got against us this time?"

"Just now," said Doc, "Ben Bigstaff was up to the judge's office. Ben's been missing some of his poultry—"

"Good night!" broke in Jerry. "We never stole any chickens in our life, Doc!"

"Well, I wouldn't say you didn't ever steal any chickens," said Doc, "because I happen to know one time when you fellas had a camp fire down there on the bank and a roasting rooster—but that was a long time ago, and I don't think you were old enough to know better, but I will say right now that I didn't think you boys stole Ben Bigstaff's hens."

"For the love of Mike!" I said. "What's Ben Bigstaff lost if it's only couple of hens? Why, say, Doc,

Ben's got the biggest lot o' chickens I ever saw around here—"

"And ducks," chimed in Roy Dobel, "and geese and—say, he's got the finest bunch of real copper-colored turkeys I ever laid eyes on, Doc."

"That's the stuff," said Doc, "the turkeys. You know Ben prides himself on those bronze turkeys, and when one was stolen, I know you boys didn't take it, but—"

"You know we didn't take it, but you want us to find out who did take it."

"Exactly!" said Doc.

I nodded my head as I looked around at the boys.

"There you have it!" I said. "We didn't have anything to do with it, but we've got to find out who did. Can you beat it?"

Doc had a little smile upon his face.

"Well," he said, "can you blame the Judge for that? What did the Judge call you fellas—Junior Police, wasn't it? Well, then, I should think it would be an honor to have the Judge call you that. And I've got an idea that you'll live up to the name. Good-by, boys."

After Doc had gone, our captain hit the table with his wooden hammer and the meeting was adjourned.

. . . . . .

Well, it was Shadow and I who found the guilty one. We had gone down by the old cliff path together—Shadow likes to roam around with me, and I like to take the old paths that remind me of the days when Stoner and Stormie and Harkinson used to come around our old river bank. And this particular afternoon we ran smack into a camp fire—the neatest you ever saw—and above it, upon prongs, was a long stick, upon which a nice fat duck was roasting.

"Well," I said with a grin as I turned to Shadow, "here's the guy who's swiping Ben Bigstaff's poultry."

"You mean this is his camp fire," corrected Shadow with a smile, "but where is the one who—"

"We will wait here till he comes," I said, sitting down beside the fire. We had not long to wait. The crackling of twigs on the foot path soon drew our attention, and we saw coming toward us the most raggedy, dilapidated boy I've ever seen—except one. That one exception was Shadow's own brother, whom we used to call the Rolling Stone.

"Hello!" called this strange-looking ragpicker. "Have I got company, by George? Gee! I'm tickled to death. Stay for supper?"

Now I am usually soft-hearted; but something in the way this boy offered us supper on somebody else's poultry got under my skin.

"Excuse me," I said, getting up. "We were just warming ourselves by your fire—"

"And we will be glad to stay for supper," broke in Shadow, as he secretly nudged me with his elbow.

"Fine!" exclaimed our newly found friend. "You'll taste a roasted duck that will make you wonder how you ever could be satisfied with anything else. And the gravy! Oh, the gravy! See that tin pan underneath? That catches the gravy. Wait till I mix a little something. Say, I'm a cook from Cooksville. You fellas go on with your chat while I fix up—"

To make a long story short, we stayed and ate of this ragpicker's supper. Surprise followed on the heels of surprise. He brought out bread, fresh from under a hidden place; butter that was sweet, and a stalk of celery; salt and pepper shakers from the inside of his ragged coat, and a mess of black-roasted potatoes from a rusted

can full of coals. I wanted to refuse everything, but Shadow nudged me every time. And finally I ate. I happened to think of something. It was Shadow's own no-account brother whom he had denied, until one day in the cliff cave, when he had found him too late. Yeah, it was too late for Shadow to make up then, for his brother died there in that cliff cave. Shadow's own no-account brother, Rolling Stone John, was the cause of my eating that supper there in the ruddy glow of that dim camp fire.

"Now," said Shadow, after we had completed the meal, "would you please keep us company back to our shack?"

"I sure will," said he of the raggedy clothes, "if you will wait till I put my house in order."

And so, putting his tin dishes away and covering up the fire, he came away with us. We chatted nonsense till we reached the clubhouse. Not a soul was there. We went inside.

"Swell shack!" said our friend. "Gee whiz! I saw this place many times, but I never got nerve enough to come in. Swell place, yeah, bo!"

"Make yourself at home," I said. "I've got to go home for an hour or so, but I'll be back. Keep the stove going with the wood you find behind it. Keep warm and comfortable, friend."

Shadow followed me to the door.

"We've got him," I said.

"No," said Shadow, "I want nothing to do with it. If you turn him over to the sheriff for stealing chickens and ducks, I don't want to be here when it happens."

"All right," I said, "you duck out when I come back."

. . . . . .

I came back to the clubhouse as soon as I could get away from home. The clubhouse was dark, but my writing room was lighted up. I slipped in quietly and tiptoed to the curtains that separate the two rooms. Shadow was sitting in my desk chair, and beside him was the raggedy stranger of the afternoon who had shared his roast duck with us. Shadow was showing him one of my books of famous paintings.

I stayed out in the meeting room and lit the lamps as quietly as I could. All of a sudden I heard the sound of voices on the porch outside. I ran and opened the door.

"Here's Hawkins," sang out Little Sam, for he was the first, and behind him was Guy Malapo and his brother Stan. "Hawkins has what you want and—

"The coin!" cried Guy Malapo. "For heaven's sake, Hawkins, hand over that Chinese coin. That Chinaman has been after me since—"

"Not so loud," I cut him short. "We can talk in quiet, can't we?"

"Have you got it?" he asked in a whisper.

"I have," I answered. "It is in my desk; in my writing room beyond—"

Before I could go further, Robby Hood shoved through the door.

"Doc Waters and the sheriff are on the river path," he said quickly. "They said you had the chicken thief in your clubhouse and they are coming for him."

"We have," I said lightly, "but who could have told him? Only Shadow and I found him this afternoon—"

"Briggen and his Pelham boys are with the sheriff," explained Robby.

"See here!" called Guy Malapo sharply. "I'll have

no part in your chicken-thief quarrel. Just hand over to me the Chinese coin, and—"

"Go slow, Guy Malapo," I said softly. "The Chinese coin is bad luck. As you see, the bad luck is coming again to this clubhouse because the coin is here. Thank your stars you haven't got it—"

"Give it to me!" he cried. "Give it to me and let me out of this—"

"All right!" I shouted. "You shall have it. Perry, run and get it for him."

Perry ran into the little room and brought out the coin. I handed it to Guy Malapo.

"There!" I said. "You have the coin. Sorry you didn't come sooner so we wouldn't have got this last piece of bad luck—"

"Hold on, everybody! Stand still there, Hawkins, and every boy here."

It was the sheriff's voice that boomed from the porch steps. Guy Malapo, the Chinese coin still in his hand, backed into me where I stood.

"You got a chicken stealer here, Hawkins?" drawled the sheriff as he came into the meeting room, Doc Waters behind him. And beyond the porch steps I caught a fleeting glimpse of the Pelham fellows. "Ah, there he is. Hi there, Shadow, tote out that turkey thief."

For a second there was silence, both in the front room and the back. Then suddenly Shadow Loomis came to the curtained doorway that separated the two rooms.

"Who do you want, Sheriff?" he asked. "Did you mention a name?"

But Shadow was thrust aside. The raggedy kid stood in front of him.

"Come and take me if you can," he said defiantly. He laughed. Then his eyes fell upon Guy Malapo, and like a flash the laugh died. His face grew pale, and without another word he turned and ran back into my little room where I always write the minutes. The sheriff shouted, but the sound of his voice was drowned by the sound of breaking glass, and together we surged through the doorway.

"He's gone!" came Shadow Loomis' voice. Shadow stood pointing to the broken window.

The sheriff turned to Doc Waters.

"Well?" he said.

Doc shrugged his shoulders and gave a little laugh.

"You're the sheriff," said Doc, "not me. Better luck next time."

They went, leaving us alone. And there in the meeting room the four of us stood when we were ready to turn out the lights. Guy Malapo's face was white. He looked as if he had seen a ghost.

"What's the matter, Guy?" I asked. "Can I do anything?"

He shook his head.

"No," he said, "not a thing." And then before I could think he shoved out his hand and I took it and shook it. "Good night, Hawkins," he said.

Then he leaped out of the door and was gone. Shadow stood beside me. We two were left alone. I looked at Shadow, Shadow looked at me.

"You could have held him!" I cried, pointing my finger in his face.

Shadow flushed.

"You could have got rid of that!" he exclaimed, pointing to my hand. I had not thought of it. I lowered my hand and loosed my fingers. There was the Chinese

coin; I still had it. Good heaven! Could I ever get rid of it?

"Why?" I asked Shadow, "did Guy put it back into my hand after I had given it back to him? Why did he refuse to take it?"

Shadow shook his head.

"Don't ask me riddles," he said. "I don't know; you don't know; none of us knows; but Hawkins, bet your last bum nickel we will find out soon."

Which we did.

XI

The Sign of the Scorpion

NOW," I said to Shadow Loomis, as soon as our meeting was over, "we've got some work to do."

It was the day after our meeting with the chicken stealer.

"Yes," said Shadow, "there are a lot of things we don't understand. There is more trouble coming than we even dream of, Hawkins."

"I know it," I told him. "A lot of mysteries that need explaining, Shad. And believe me, I'm going to find some way to explain 'em, too. First thing I want to know is why Guy Malapo got cold feet and gave me back that Chinese coin, after he seemed so anxious to get it. I knew something was up the minute he got a slant at the chicken stealer. I saw his face go white the minute he saw that raggedy kid's face."

"That was odd, sure," said Shadow, "but how will you go about it? Guy Malapo won't talk."

"Let's see if he won't, anyhow," I said. "I am going to send for him and tell him for the last time to take this Chinese coin. It was him I got it from, and it's him as ought to get it back—from me at least. Let him pass it on to the one he got it from. If he won't take it this time, I will tell him that I'm going to throw it in the river. It'll be a fair warning, anyhow."

Shadow grinned and was about to say something, but suddenly his glance fell upon the window, and he pointed as he spoke:

"By Jove! Hawkins, there they come now—the two

Malapo kids. We'll find out what they have to say, at any rate."

But Shadow was mistaken. We watched them come down the river path, but they passed right by the clubhouse and made toward the river.

"Come on," I said, reaching for my coat. "We can follow 'em, I guess."

The two boys had reached the river, and a Pelham flatboat was coming across. There was only one Pelham boy in it, and as he neared I saw it was Briggen, the leader of the Pelham gang. He had a grin on his face as he made the landing and stood up in his boat, allowing the oars to drop in the locks. I could see that the Malapo boys were expecting him.

"I got your message, Guy," said Briggen with a broad grin. "You wanted me to come for ye. Here I be."

"Yeah," said Guy Malapo, nodding. "I want to see that fella—"

"I'll take ya to whar' he hangs out, but it's a secret, ya know. I'm takin' a big risk doin' this fer ya, but I know ya, Guy. You're a real fella—you'll pay me what it's worth—"

"Don't worry about that," said Guy quickly. "But can you promise me that I will be safe. You know the last time I got a nasty beating from that rowdy, and if Hawkins or—"

"Not so loud!" broke in Briggen. "Don't mention names. Jump in this boat yere, an' we kin talk goin' down. I don't want that Hawkins bunch to see me ferryin' ya any place. They don't trust nobody. If they knowed I was doin' this—"

"All right," spoke up Guy, stepping into the boat. "Let's go."

From our hiding place behind the evergreens that line the river path Shadow and I watched until the boat had turned the lower bend.

"Well," I said, "looks like a double-cross. Briggen's Pelham gang working against us."

"They've always done that," said Shadow simply. "But have you any idea who they are working with now?"

"I have," I said. "It's as plain as day, although I don't understand why Guy Malapo is going to call on 'em."

"More mystery that needs explaining," said Shadow, "and I'm just in the notion to find out the explanation. Come on if you want to. My canoe is under the landing."

So we jumped into his canoe and both of us took up a paddle, and we followed them down past the old wreck of the *Smoky City* and down past Hobbs Ferry. After that we knew where they were heading.

To the island! Seven Willows Island, the scene of many former adventures. We watched them land on the sandy beach below our old summer camping place. And as soon as they were out and up the beach, we landed some distance below and took up the chase afoot. Shadow Loomis had played spy for our club on this old island for several summers. He led the way through a maze of trees that were hanging with dead vines, forming a sort of curtain, and upon the ground the soft carpet of many layers of damp, dead leaves made it possible for us to go almost unheard. Suddenly Shadow drew up in front of me. We were about fifty feet from the four boys, and they had stopped.

"You stay here, Stan," said Guy to his brother. "You stay and be on the lookout. If anybody comes,

give a whistle and run. We will take a roundabout way and meet you on the beach when it's all safe."

"All right," said Stan. "But if you see him, tell him to sneak up to the house and see me before he goes away. Now do that, Guy."

"I'll do that," said Guy, but something in his voice made me feel like he was telling a lie. I didn't know what it was all about. But I knew this: that Guy Malapo had some business to do that he didn't want his younger brother to know. That's why he told him to stay behind there and watch. Guy didn't want Stan to be with him when he reached the place he was headed for.

We waited till their footsteps died out. Then it was careful treading, so that Stan should not hear and know we were there. We wanted to find out what Guy Malapo's game was, and if Stan heard us and gave a whistle, it would spoil the whole business for us. But we got away over those damp, dead leaves, and left Stan standing like a statue where his brother had told him to watch.

And I didn't need to catch up with Guy Malapo and his Pelham gang, either, to find out where they were going. I knew it. Believe me, I knew they were heading for the old stockade and log house built by Harkinson before the days of the Red Runners. Something told me that, and I was right.

The old stockade had been repaired. New logs had been cut and put up where old ones had fallen out. The old stone chimney of the log house had been built up, and smoke issued from it, a spiral smudge against a gray sky. The big log gate of the stockade was just closing upon Guy Malapo and his pals as we came up.

"Well," said Shadow, coming to a stop, "do we wait here, or do we go on?"

"We go on," I said doggedly. "We've come this far, and we might as well go farther. Can we scale that stockade, do you think?"

"I know I can," said Shadow, "but how about you, fatty?"

"I'll make it somehow," I said. "Go on."

We went around to the back and scaled the log fence behind the log house. Shadow was up and over in no time, but with me it's different. I am too fat for this sort o' business, and it gets my wind. But I didn't give up, and the third time's a charm, and I went up with my right toe-hold on a knot sticking out of one of the logs, and Shadow was standing inside and wanted me to let myself down on his shoulders; but if I had, he'd have been a pancake. So I just plumped down and landed on the ground sitting up.

"Whew!" I said, when I got my breath. "This spy work is hard, but I guess it's worth it."

There was a chink in the log house; the plaster had fallen out, and we looked through. An old oil lamp lit up the inside of the shack. Around the walls stood many boys. At a little table in the center sat—Cheeky! And across the table from him stood Guy Malapo and Briggen.

"I don't believe you," Cheeky was saying, looking up into Guy's face. "It doesn't sound right."

"Take it or leave it," said Guy carelessly. "It is as I told you. They are trying to get a big price for the Chinese coin. That's their game."

"Who'd give it?" asked Cheeky with a grin. "Do they know that?"

"They know that many people are looking for the

coin—wanting it badly. Hawkins is bad, but the other one is worse. Get him first. If he hasn't got it, he can tell you who has. Take my word, they're both in cahoots on this thing, trying to get what they want for that coin. And if they don't get it, I'm thinkin' they'll put an end to that coin somehow. Most likely throw it in the river at some place where nobody would ever think of lookin' for it."

"Who is this other one besides Hawkins?" asked Cheeky.

"I can't give you his name," said Guy, "but I can tell you how you'll find him. He's in the neighborhood of the clubhouse, and he steals chickens and such things. Get him and whip him till he promises to go away from here. Then get Hawkins and whip him till he gives up the coin. That's all I ask from you in return for this information."

Cheeky got up and came around the table.

"Boy," he said, laying his hand on Guy's shoulder, "you ought to belong to our Scorpions. You sure can hate!"

"No," said Guy Malapo, "I don't bother myself to hate anybody except those two. I hate the one because —well, I needn't tell you, but I hate him. And as for Hawkins, I hate him because he meddles too much with my affairs. That's all. Now you can take it or leave it. I've given you the right steer. I'll do no more."

"Wait!" called Cheeky, as Guy started away. "Lissen. You join our gang. You show us this one fella who steals chickens, and we'll do the rest. I make you that bargain, Malapo. You join us and show us this guy. If he hasn't got the coin, we'll tackle Hawkins. And we will promise you a leading part in our gang. We ought to have you."

Guy turned swiftly.

"I'm no weakling," he said quietly. "I'll show you I'm game. I take you up. I'll join your gang."

Cheeky clapped his hands as he spoke. The silent figures of the boys around the walls of the log house suddenly became active and moved hurriedly about. "We will initiate you at once," continued Cheeky.

The next minute those boys brought from one corner a three-legged stand with a tray and some instruments on it. Others ran to Guy and began to roll up his sleeve until the arm well above the wrist was bared. Cheeky told Guy to raise his right hand and promise that he would stick to the Scorpions from start to finish; that the cause of the Scorpions, no matter what the cause was, was always right because it was the cause of the Scorpions. After which he took the instruments from the tray and made a mark upon Guy's wrist, and I could see through the chink in the logs that upon the wrist of Guy Malapo there was now the mark of the Scorpion—a spider with a long tail.

"Now," said Cheeky, "you are a member of our gang. You belong to the famous gang of Scorpions, and you will be proud—"

But we heard no further, for at this moment came faintly the sound of a whistle, and Shadow and I, knowing it was Stanley Malapo giving the signal that somebody was coming, as his brother had told him to do, climbed over the fence and made our way as quickly as possible from that nest of Scorpions. Hardly had we gone a rod before we saw coming toward us Stanley Malapo on a dead run. He was headed for the stockade, although he probably had no idea where he was going, and was intent only upon finding his brother. We paused behind the interlacing vines until he went by,

then we continued. At the sandy beach we found Jerry Moore and the rest of our boys, just landing from the canoes in which they had come.

"I told you!" cried Jerry to the others, as he saw us come out of the trees. "How's that for tracking 'em? I bet Dick Ferris a nickel I could find you, Hawkins."

"I knew you would," I said with a little smile. "That's why I told Shadow to hide behind the trees there—"

"We heard you whistle," said Jerry. "Then I knew you had seen us."

"Yes," I said, "you heard the whistle, of course."

And then we went back. Shadow and I waited until all the canoes had started, and then we trailed the river procession.

"Well," said Shadow, "you heard the talk in the log house. They are on your trail, Hawkins. I don't know what it's all about, but it looks certain that you're in for a lot of trouble. We will have to watch our steps."

Which we did.

XII

The Ghost on the Cliff

ALL of us boys were crowded in my little writing room in back of our clubhouse. The Pelham leader and his two cronies, Ham Gardner and Dave Burns, had come to tell us some startling news. None of us boys like the Pelhams, anyway, and we only let them in our clubhouse because they insisted that they had something very important to tell us. They came just after meeting on Tuesday afternoon, right after school was out.

"You say you saw this thing at nine o'clock last night?" I asked.

"Mebbe a little later," spoke up Ham Gardner. "Briggen ain't sure o' the time, Hawkins. It war purty late at night and dark—"

"Where were you when you saw the specter?" I asked, hiding a grin behind my hand as I spoke.

"We war' coming up the river in a flatboat," said Ham Gardner, "and I says to Briggen, thar, I says, 'It's a mighty dark night to-night,' an' he says 'Yes, it is,' an' just then Dave, he give a little cough-like sound and dropped the oars, and he pointed and we saw it—plain as I see you now. It war' a horse, white and shiny-like, gallopin' without a sound."

"Just where was the ghost when you discovered it?" I asked.

"Ya know where the cliff cave is—up where Stoner's Boy used to disappear? " spoke up Dave Burns.

"I'll never forget that place."

"Well, right in front of it we saw the thing first. Hawkins, if it was only a white, silent horse, I'd-a been all right. But when I saw that funny-lookin' shine all around it, it got me. I ain't scared easy; you know that. I am purty tough, I am. But that thing got me. Yeah, bo! It weren't natural."

"How long did it stay on the cliff?" I asked.

"It was running to the cave when we first saw it," said Dave. "Then when it reached the cave it turned around and ran back about fifty feet on the cliff path. Then it turned again and ran back to the cave."

"Are you sure it went into the cave?" I asked.

"I ain't sure of nothin' but this one thing," said Dave, thumping his fist down on my desk. "I'm sure of this: that shiny white horse is a ghost of a horse, and that's all there's to it."

"Did it have a rider?" I asked.

All three of the boys refused to answer the question. It seemed that none of them remembered. They had been so frightened at seeing a silent flitting white shape of a horse that they did not remember whether or not it had a rider on its back.

"All right," I said, "we will be on the lookout. You Pelham boys stay away from the cliff path. You haven't any right over on our side of the river, anyhow. We never come over to your side, do we? And we don't want to, what's more—"

"We ain't aimin' to make a fuss," broke in Briggen. "Hawkins, we be peaceful fellas. We ain't never done nothin' to you guys since you helped us get out of trouble with the Red Runners—"

I held up my hand. I had a notion to call his bluff. He didn't know that I knew he and his gang were in league with Cheeky's gang. I felt like telling it to his

face, but I knew if I disclosed that, all of the boys in my gang would have jumped him then and there and there would have been a fight.

"No," I said, "we must not fight between us. Briggen, let me give you a little piece of advice. You don't know a good friend when you see one. I'm telling you right here and now that if you boys want to keep out of a lot of trouble, you will mind your own business, and remember that we boys over here have done you a lot of good in the past. That's all. Now git."

. . . . . .

As soon as I was left alone I started to write down the minutes of the meeting and this other foolishness that the Pelham fellows had brought, about the spook horse on the cliff. I was kept busy for almost a half hour, I think. Just as I was about to close my book, in comes Shadow all out of breath.

"I've found the chicken stealer's camp!" he announced. "Do you want to try to catch him? The sheriff said he would give five bucks if we landed him."

I looked at the little brass clock on my desk.

"It's too late," I said. "My mother always has supper sharp at six."

"How about to-night, then?" asked Shadow. "It's a camp fire—easy to find the way back—we might have lots of fun—"

"All right," I cut him short. "You come home with me to supper. Then you can say you want me to walk down to the landing with you—see? That'll be a good excuse for me to get out, and then we can go and pay this chicken stealer a visit."

. . . . . .

We played a few games of dominoes with dad after supper. He likes for me to bring Shadow home with

me, and we had him in a pretty good humor by the time we wanted to get out. Ma isn't so hard to get around. She usually will let me go out for a little while. And when Shadow said he wanted me to go down to the boat with him, dad said "O. K.," and we went.

We lost no time. Once in the boat, Shadow turned southward and we sped away. In the mouth of Cave River we landed, ducking our heads to escape the overhanging rough branches of the dead winter willows. Here we left the boat, and Shadow led me on, up the steep bank, climbing up the rocks, until we stood on the "plateau," as we called it, a level space that reached from the bank to the cliff path. A ruddy glow ahead showed where the camp fire was. As we neared it I saw that a solitary figure crouched before the cheery blaze. It was a cold night and trying to snow.

"There he is," whispered Shadow. "Shall we rush him at once, or wait a while?"

Before we had time to decide, there was a rustling in the dried bushes, and a boy stepped out into the firelight. The boy behind the fire leaped to his feet.

"Who is it?" he cried in a sharp voice.

"Stan," came the reply, and the voice sounded familiar. And on looking closer, I saw that it was Stanley Malapo.

"Stan!" cried the other, rushing forward, and his raggedy clothes flapped about him like the broken wings of a bird. "Oh, Stan!" he cried again, and he fell into the arms of the newcomer. "I thought you'd given me up, Stan. I thought you'd passed me by."

"I wanted to see you," he said. "I always told Guy to tell you—"

"I wouldn't talk to him!" cried the raggedy chicken stealer. "I don't ever want to see him again—"

"He's your brother as much as I am," broke in Stanley Malapo.

And then for the first time I knew. The raggedy one was a Malapo boy. He was the "bum" that Guy despised. He was the one that Guy had wanted the Scorpions to whip and run out of this town. Oh! And they were all brothers together!

"I came to warn you!" said Stanley Malapo, shaking the raggedy one's arm. "I just found out to-day. Guy is afraid of you alone, but he has signed up with a gang of boys to help him beat you up and drive you out of this neighborhood. They are coming to-night. I want you to go, John. You know I like you—"

The raggedy one stood erect. He was a head taller than little Stan, and he smiled down at his younger brother as he patted his shoulder.

"Good little Stan!" he said. "You always were good to me, you little straight soldier. Ever since I ran away you were true blue to me—"

"Oh, please hurry, John. I hear them coming. See, there is the light of their torches. Go! Oh, John, please go—"

"Go!" cried John. "Go and run from that snide? I don't run from traitors, Stan. I run to them, with my fist doubled up—"

But Stanley Malapo placed his hand over the raggedy one's mouth. He whispered something in the little tramp's ear. And the next minute Stanley Malapo stood alone. The raggedy one had disappeared in the shadows. And from the direction of the cliff path were coming many shapes, carrying torches. The glow of the rosin flames could be seen moving steadily like a cloud of fire toward where we sat crouching behind the dead winter bushes. I saw Shadow's eye gleaming in

the light as the glare of the torches neared us. But I switched my gaze toward the camp fire. Stanley Malapo had quickly taken a seat by the fire and put upon the dying blaze a few pieces of wood. Then he looked backward. He grabbed a blanket partly covered with fine snow and threw it about his shoulders and hunched himself up, for all the world like an Indian. On came the silent torch parade, and at the camp fire they halted. The first one, the strutting, conceited one, I recognized at once as Guy Malapo. Behind him and a little apart of the crowd was the yellow-haired Cheeky, leader of the gang.

"Here," spoke Guy Malapo; "this is the place. My fine fellow, we have come to pay you a call. Do look up."

He spoke to the figure huddled in a blanket that was partly covered with snow. But Stan Malapo was playing a part. He continued to gaze into the fire as though he had not heard; and then more than ever did he look like an Indian.

Guy Malapo, with an arrogant look upon his face, strode toward the huddled boy.

"You don't seem to hear well." He spoke sharply now. "Perhaps I shall have to make you—"

But the yellow-haired Cheeky jerked Guy Malapo roughly back.

"I'll 'tend to this," he said harshly. "You want to spoil everything? Here, fella, is your name Malapo?"

The huddled figure by the fire nodded slowly.

"It is," he answered in a low voice.

"You see!" cried Guy Malapo. "I told you. Nobody but he would have a camp fire so close to town as this. Nobody would be here but a Mal—"

Suddenly there came the most unholy shriek I had

ever heard in my life. I felt Shadow's fingers grip around my arm, and my hair stood up straight at the same time. Oh, boy! I was never so scared in my life. But I was so interested in what I saw that I forgot my fright the next second. For all of the torch-bearers behind Cheeky and Guy Malapo had turned at the sound. The whole gang had turned and gazed upward. And there upon the cliff path was a strange-looking sight. It was a white horse, with long, flowing draperies that might have been made of clouds plucked from the sky and silvered with moonlight, and upon the back of the horse a wonderfully dressed rider in white, with a big hat with a flowing white feather. At the mouth of Cliff Cave the apparition paused and the rider looked down upon the frightened group below at the camp fire.

Cheeky's boys took only one look at the strange specter. Then, with a loud yell together, they dropped their torches and fled. The darkness swallowed them up. There was only the dull glow of the camp fire before us. And even the huddled figure that had been Stan Malapo was gone. We two, Shadow and I, were left alone with the dying embers of the deserted camp fire. And, it seemed, as suddenly disappeared the white ghost of the horse and rider above on the cliff. I say it went into the cave, but Shadow says no. It simply disappeared, he says, into thin air.

"I watched it," he said, as we crawled our way back to our boat. "I watched it closer than you did, and I tell you that that white horse and rider did not go into a cave or anything else; it simply disappeared."

"Well," I said as we started back home, "if we stick together and work hard we'll be able to lay that ghost some day."

Which we did.

XIII

Sadler's Seventeen

ALL of us boys met at the clubhouse as usual right after school was out and held our regular meeting. There was no talk except about the ghost on the cliff.

And Shadow and I were appointed to tell Doc Waters all about the strange doings on the cliff. Doc grinned at first when we mentioned a ghost. "You boys can dig up more ghosts and strange stories than anybody I ever heard of," he said. "Really, Hawkins, you should write a book about all the strange things you have seen." I told him that I was thinking about that myself, and maybe some day I would write it down in a book for people to read.

Well, I told Doc everything I knew about the white horse and rider that appeared on the cliff at night. And when I had finished the story he didn't laugh any more. He went to the telephone and called up Jeckerson, the detective in Watertown, and told him to come down the first chance he had. Jeckerson came that night, and Doc Waters came to my house and told my mother that he wanted me to go on a little errand with him. Jeckerson was waiting at Doc's office, and Shadow Loomis was there, and the four of us went to the place on the river bank where we could watch the cliff. And we waited there for the ghost to appear, but it didn't show itself. And finally we had to go home, it was so late, and Doc and Jeckerson told me they thought I

was trying to kid them. But I knew that they believed me, anyway. They had some other reason for expecting something to show itself on the cliff; perhaps not on the cliff, but they expected something. I could tell by some of the things that Jeckerson said in a low voice to Doc Waters.

On Wednesday all of us boys went up the river to see the steamboat fire. The *River Queen* was burned to the water line, and the *Lucy Lee* had caught fire, too, but the firemen had put out the blaze before it was damaged much.

There was such a crowd around the boats and so much noise that our bunch soon got parted, and when I thought we had seen enough and was ready to go back, I couldn't get them all together. As I walked through the crowd somebody grabbed my arm and I turned quickly, startled. But I knew the boy at first look. It was Sadler, the leader of a gang in Watertown which he called "Sadler's Seven."

"Hello, Hawkins!" he said. "Now ain't this funny? I was coming down to your clubhouse to see you. Ain't that funny?"

"It sure is," I told him, "but you can come down, anyway. We are always glad to see you boys, Sadler. Your gang and ours are allies, you know. I hope you haven't forgotten that."

"That's one reason I was coming down," he said with a grin, "because it's time for us to be allies again. You fellas are in trouble."

"I know it," I said with a smile. "Seems like we can never keep out of trouble, Sadler."

"That's a fact," he said, rubbing his sore eye; "you sure are the hard-luck bunch. But we are going to help you out. You know this fella Cheeky very well?"

"I know him a-plenty," I said. "His gang's against us and he is pretty mean to us."

"Well, my bunch has a little bone to pick with him," said Sadler, "and to-night we will meet them, but they don't know it."

"Don't know you will meet them?"

"No. You see, my spies, Watts and Grimm—you know those two tall boys—"

"I remember them."

"They found out for me that Cheeky and his gang are going to attack your clubhouse to-night. Their main idea is to get you, Hawkins."

"I know that's what they're after."

"Well, I'm afraid they will give you an awful beating if they ever lay hands on you. But you just trust to me and my gang. We are going to save you. There's one boy in that Cheeky outfit I specially want a chance to punch. His name is Guy something or other—"

"Guy Malapo?"

"That's him. Oh, what I will do to him will be a-plenty. He is the smart ellick, if there ever was one. No use to tell you any more; wait till you see to-night. We'll be there, all right. Do you fellas have a meeting to-night?"

"We have singing practice on Wednesday nights."

"Yeah, and Cheeky's gang knows all about it. Well, don't breathe a word to a soul, will you?"

"Not a word," I assured him, and with that Sadler darted away and was lost in the crowd.

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Everything happened just as Sadler told me it would.

We met at seven o'clock for singing practice in our little old clubhouse. Lew Hunter was at the organ and

the boys were all standing behind him, singing a new song that Lew had sent away for last week. I paused on the porch before I went in, because I had seen a shadow on the path down near the river. At first I thought I was mistaken, but then I knew I wasn't, for Doc Waters came from the path, followed by the sheriff. I knew something was up.

"Don't tell anyone you saw us down here, Hawkins," Doc told me. "We are going to watch for the ghost. If it doesn't show up to-night, I'll think you've been fooling us."

Before I could answer him he had turned and, with the sheriff, he moved toward the cliff. I knew then that there was something connected with that ghost that we boys didn't dream of. If Doc and the sheriff were interested in it, I knew there was something up.

I went in and took my place among the boys and joined in the singing. I can't sing so good, but I like to hear the other boys warble. The high voices of Lew Hunter and Dick Ferris led the song:

"There's to me a dear old spot
That will never be forgot
In the valley just down by the riverside—"

How those boys could harmonize! Oh, boy! You can take your opera singers, with their high-toned thunder, but give me a bunch of boys singing in harmony. Most always I forget to sing myself. I just stand and listen, and my heart seems to swell up. And so I was doing this night—listening instead of singing, and every once in a while it would seem to me that I would hear the soft sound of bells, as of sleighbells being shaken for a few seconds. Above the singing in the clubhouse I could hear the bells. But when I would

turn my head to listen more intently, the sound would be gone.

Suddenly my eye caught a movement outside. I stooped and pressed my face against the window pane. Yes, they had come! The whole gang, carrying torches, was out there in front of the porch, and two of them were coming up the porch steps with sticks in their hands. Before they could reach the door I had slipped quietly out and, closing the door softly behind me, I stood facing my two enemies, Guy Malapo and Cheeky.

"We have come for you, Hawkins," said Cheeky, with a wide grin.

"I know," I said, nodding, "and you see I am here. All I ask is that you don't disturb the singing going on inside. Let the other boys alone. They haven't done anything to you. It's me you want, isn't it?"

"You're all we're after," said Guy Malapo, taking me roughly by the arm. I felt like striking his hand off my sleeve, but I knew it was wiser to go. I knew Doc Waters and the sheriff were somewhere near. They would come to help me before it was too late. Whereas, if the rest of our boys came out and saw what was up, there would be a rough-and-tumble fight sure enough.

"I'll follow," I said. "You don't need to grab me like that, Guy Malapo. If you and I were alone, you would be afraid to do that."

He sneered at me. "Shut up," he snapped. "Come on; we'll fix you."

I hurried down the steps before any further talk could attract the attention of my pals in the clubhouse, and as I did so, there began the sound of silver bells.

"What's that?" demanded Cheeky.

They all listened, but the bells had stopped. "It's

only a sleigh passing up on the main road, most likely," said Guy Malapo. "Come on."

They fell into line, the whole gang. There must have been about fifteen or twenty, all carrying rosin torches, and off they started, Cheeky and Guy Malapo each holding my arm and following the line. It was an odd sight, I tell you, that line of smoking torches winding away before me, and I knew, too, that unless something happened very soon I was in for a beating. If Doc Waters let them get too far away before he came to my help, it would be all up with me.

The gang stopped within a little while, and I was really surprised. I thought they would take me farther on, perhaps to some hidden place where they held out. But here they stood right below the very cliff on which the ghost had appeared.

The boys with the torches formed a ring, and each boy stuck the handle of the torch into the snow-covered ground, making a circle of lights. While I was waiting for them to do something, I heard again the soft sound of the bells. Cheeky heard it, too, and so did Guy. Guy paid little attention to it, but Cheeky smelt a rat. "I don't like that noise," he said. "What is it?" But Guy silenced him. "You are always hearing things," he said. "Shut up for a little while, will you. Give me that whip, Brady."

A boy came from behind his torch and handed Guy Malapo a doubled-up blacksnake whip.

"Now, Seckatary Hawkins," he said, "you are going to get what's coming to you. You think you are a smart boy, don't you? Well, you'll smart after you learn this lesson. Stand there in the middle of the ring.

He shoved me forward, and the next second he swung the long whip loose. I saw it flash in the torchlight as

it came down and wrapped itself about my shoulders. The tip of it stung my cheek. Oh, boy, how it hurt!

He drew back his hand. He had the whip raised to strike again, but he never brought it down. No. For a sound came from the cliff path above us, and every boy there raised his head to see—it was the sound of the bells that had attracted them.

And now they came—those bells—jingle-jing; jingle-jing; jingle-jing.

A long line of ponies, each with a boy in the saddle, was coming swiftly down the cliff path. In the light from the torches they looked like grotesque knights, their huge shadows leaping behind them against the solid wall of rock. And around the neck of each pony was a ring of little bells that made the jingling noise.

"Sadler's Seven!" I shouted. "Hooray, Sadler! Come on!"

They came. Golly, how they came! It sounded funny to call them Sadler's Seven. It was Sadler's gang, all right, but it had grown in numbers. They shouted as they came:

"Rah! Rah! Rah! The Red and Green!
Make way for Sadler's Seventeen!"

Guy Malapo gave a cry of fright. He dropped the whip and ran. Cheeky tried to call out an order, but his gang was panic-stricken. He couldn't have held them with anything. The best he could do was to follow them, which he did, on a run. They didn't even stop to pick up their torches, which they had stuck in the ground.

The foremost rider rode up to the circle of burning sticks and leaped from his pony.

"Sorry they gave you that one swipe, Hawkins," he

sang out. "It's my fault. Wanted to let 'em get good and set before we scared 'em, and I waited just a little too long. Sorry, old boy."

"It's all right, Sadler," I said, as I shook the hand he held out to me. "I got a little scratch on the cheek where the tip of his whip struck—"

"Dog-gone!" exclaimed Sadler. "Ain't that a shame! Kick me, will you please, Hawkins? I'll feel better if you will. Here come the rest. Look at 'em. You know Watts, here, and Grimm. And there's Barker and Rule—"

He was introducing the boys as they rode up. They leaped from their ponies to come forward. And we stood there in the light from the torches, and they told me how they had watched the clubhouse all night, waiting for Cheeky's Scorpions to attack. My coming out and preventing a general fight had spoilt their original plan, Sadler said, but they went up the cliff path and watched everything from that high place, coming to save me in the nick of time.

"Hold on, thar," suddenly came from the trees, and out stepped the sheriff. Doc Waters was behind him, and I could see a grin on Doc's face. "Which one o' you youngsters rides a white hoss?"

Doc stepped up, laughing.

"Hawkins," he said, "the sheriff and I were waiting to see that ghost of a horse and rider appear on the cliff path. Suddenly we saw a long line of 'em coming down—"

"This is Sadler, Doc," I broke in. "You remember him, don't you? He and his gang ride on ponies, you know. His father runs the pony track at the summer park—"

"Yes, and he's the one, most likely, that makes the

hoss-and-rider ghost on the cliff," broke in the sheriff. "I bet you there's a white hoss in his pappy's stable—"

But Doc Waters laughed.

"It's time to go home, Sheriff," he said. "Quit your argument and let these youngsters go home to their beds."

Which we did.

XIV

In the Log House

"WELL," said Shadow Loomis, after the meeting next day, "let's get down to business. Those Scorpions are going to give us trouble soon. Cheeky wants the Chinese coin; you know that. And Guy Malapo joined the gang only so that he could give you a beating. Trouble is bound to start soon."

"Guy Malapo should have the coin," I said, "yet I don't feel like giving it to him, because he has double-crossed me."

"Why do you say he should have the coin?" asked Shadow.

"Because he is the one I got it from," I said, "and what's more—"

"Cheeky put it in your pocket that night when his gang tied you to that cornfield fence," broke in Shadow, "so you're wrong about that. But never mind. The coin has done nothing but bring bad luck to all of us ever since you've had it. If you'll take my advice, you'll send it back to Cheeky right away. Guy belongs to Cheeky's gang—they both ought to be satisfied, and it's one reason less why they should want to fight us."

I nodded.

"You're right," I said. "I will send it back with Little Sam. They won't hurt him. If we took it, they might start something."

So I turned to my desk and pulled out the drawer. I reached in my hand, but then I paused and turned to Shadow.

"It's gone!" I said. "The coin's not here."

Shadow leaped over to my side. But the coin was gone. No use looking for it. The coin was gone. Somebody had taken it. Even as Shadow began to search my desk, I leaped away to the window and felt the lock on the sash.

"Don't look any further for it," I said. "I know now. Somebody's broken into our clubhouse while we were away. This window lock is broken. I thought the window looked a little out of line when I came down the other day, but I never thought anything about it."

Shadow looked sore.

"That's got to be stopped," he said. "We can't let anybody get away with that—breaking into our clubhouse." But the next minute he shook his head and grinned. "Well," he continued, "the one who came for that coin got what he wanted, so he will not likely come again. Let us be glad that the thing is gone."

. . . . . .

For once in my life I was the first boy down to the clubhouse on Saturday morning. As I came down the river path I saw a boy standing on the porch, his arm against the clubhouse door and his face buried in his sleeve. By the way he was shaking, I imagined he was crying. And when I got closer I heard him sobbing as though his heart would break.

I am a soft-hearted fellow. I just can't stand to see a boy sad like that. I stood still for a moment as I reached the porch, and then I said softly:

"What's the matter, buddy?"

He turned swiftly. It was Stanley Malapo, the friend of Little Sam. He seemed to be a little ashamed of himself. He brushed his eyes with his sleeve and smiled up at me like a little man.

"Hello, Hawkins," he said. "I was waiting for you."

I walked up and put my arm on his shoulder, as I opened the door.

"That's all right, Stan," I said. A fella has to have his ups and downs, I guess. Come in and tell me what's on your mind."

I led the way through the meeting room into the little cubby-hole of a room in which I do my writing. He followed me without a word. I motioned him to a chair. Then, when I had taken off my topcoat and my overshoes, I said to him:

"Might as well tell me what you were crying about, Stan. Maybe I can help you."

He shook his head.

"Don't mind about me," he said. "I guess I can get along somehow, Hawkins."

His voice was jerky. He had not yet got over the effects of his crying. Oh, boy, how sorry I felt for little Stan Malapo!

"Come on, Stan," I said sharply, "you've got something on your chest. And the quicker you get it off, the better it will be for you. What's the trouble?"

"Nothing, Hawkins," he jerked out, and his eyes welled up with tears again, but I shook my head.

"Snap out of that!" I told him. "Pull yourself together, Stan. We're friends, you and I. There's nothing to worry about."

"No," he admitted. "But it's you they're after, Hawkins. I know all about it. You got the Chinese coin. That's why they're goin' to catch you. And oh, what might happen! I wish I could make you give it up."

I looked at him in surprise.

"Why," I said, "I haven't got the coin, Stan. Some-

body broke into this clubhouse through that window right behind where you are sitting. The coin disappeared after that. I haven't got it, I tell you."

He seemed surprised, but he didn't say anything. And though I coaxed him and threatened him, I could not get another word out of him about the Chinese coin.

"If you would let me join this club," he said, "maybe I would be of help to you, Hawkins."

I smiled.

"I would sure be glad to have you, Stan," I said. "I will talk to the other fellas about it when they come down. I'm almost sure they will take you—"

"No," he broke in, "don't be too sure. They won't forget my brother Guy. He's done some nasty things, and he belongs to Cheeky's gang. And then there's John, poor fella, he's no good, either—"

"You won't be blamed for what your brothers are, Stan," I told him. "As long as you do the right thing, you're all right. And all of the boys in the clubhouse like you. They will be glad to make you a member of the club, I know."

Stan got up, and there was a new light in his eyes.

"I will come back this afternoon then," he said. "If I pass, will I be a member right away?"

"I am sure you will pass," I told him, "and I am sure you will be a member of this club from to-day on."

. . . . . .

Now the meeting took place without much ado, and I proposed the name of Stanley Malapo as a candidate for membership. Jerry Moore tried to argue something about his being connected with the gang called the Scorpions. But I had Little Sam on my side, and when he told them that Stanley would never have anything to do with the Scorpion gang, even though his brother

Guy did belong to it, the matter went by in a hurry. Add to this Shadow Loomis' suggestion that perhaps Stan Malapo would be able to give us valuable information, owing to the fact that his brother did belong to our enemies, and you can see how easy it was for Stanley's application to pass. Which it finally did, unanimously. That is a big word, but I looked it up in the dictionary, and it's all right. It means that Stan was given the vote of everybody who had the right to vote.

And then after that I wanted to be alone. It seemed to me that somehow I wasn't satisfied around that old river bank. I finally found myself down by the little old landing, where Jerry Moore's green long canoe danced an invitation to me on the thawing river.

I got in, all by myself, and paddled downstream, shoving clear of the ragged edges of ice blocks floating near, and I didn't give a look-up until I was abreast of Seven Willows Island.

Well, that gave me the cue. It seems one thing suggests another. The island suggested the log house on the farther end, built by Harkinson and the Pelhams. The last time I had seen it Shadow Loomis was with me. We had hidden behind the rear wall and peeped in the chinks. Yes, it was the time when Guy Malapo had been coaxed to join Cheeky's gang, and we had been secret witnesses to his initiation. At once there was an urge in me to visit this old log house.

You see, life is a funny proposition, after all. We think we are going some place, but really we are being led there. Nothing can make me ever believe that I went to that log house of my own free will. I went, of course, but something away back in my mind was really telling me to go there. And as I stepped through the big gate of the stockade and walked up to the door,

I raised my hand to knock, but something held back my hand, and instead I shoved the door open and went in.

There was the plain room of that old log house. In the center of it was a table and an old broken-back chair. A dim, smoking oil lamp hung from the ceiling, and seated at the table, writing in an old faded book, with only the dim light from the oil lamp upon it, was Guy Malapo.

He looked up as the light from the opened door fell upon him. He did not seem startled at all. But there came upon his face a look of deep interest.

"Ah!" he said. "It's you, Hawkins?"

"It's me," I said. "I'm here, Guy Malapo, but why I'm here I'll never be able to tell you. It wasn't because I wanted to come. I didn't know you were here alone, anyway."

He sneered.

"Of course you had to catch me alone. You probably knew. But I am not afraid of you."

"No," I said, "I don't suppose you are. I don't think I'm afraid of you, either. Do you?"

He stood up and flung his pen down so that it stuck in the soft wood of the table top.

"You smart ellick!" he cried. "You are not satisfied, are you? You took my little Sammy away from me—coaxed him, didn't you? And you weren't satisfied, were you? No! You had to go and make my brother Stan turn his back on me. On me! Me, who helped him out o' every scrape he ever got in. I saved him from many a lickin' from the old man—"

"No use spoutin' off like that, Guy," I said softly. "You'd never done half as much for Stan as he'd done for you. Take that from me, will you?"

"I'll take nothin' from you," he cried, taking off his coat. "No matter whether my pals come back to help me or not, I'm going to give you the worst licking you ever had in your life—"

He paused.

"Well," I said, "what's to hinder you?" And I began to take my topcoat off, too.

"Just one thing," he said, "just this one thing will save you. Have you got the Chinese coin? That old coin that brought bad luck to you and me? Give it to me, Hawkins, and by the Lord Harry, I'll be your friend for life."

He held out his hand to me and I saw that it trembled.

"Why," I said, "once I gave it to you, and you gave it back to me."

"But that was different," he said in a low voice that trembled. "I need it now. I need it to save my life. If you have it, for heaven's sake give it to me, and you will some day be glad that you did so."

Before I could answer him there came the sound of voices outside. Now I know voices, and I knew that these were none of my friends. The first that I could recognize was that of Cheeky, the leader of the Scorpions, in whose headquarters I now stood. There was only one way. I could not go out the door. They would catch me.

I turned to Guy Malapo.

"Do you want them to catch me here?" I asked.

His face was white. He trembled. He did not know what to do.

"I am afraid they have caught you," he said. Then he coughed. "Oh, I wish they had not come back so soon. There is no way, Hawkins. You must be caught. But you will give me the coin—"

"I have not the coin," I said, "but I know of one way to escape, if you promise me not to tell that I was here."

He waved his hand. The voices were not at the door right outside.

"Go!" he said quickly.

And I took the one way that I remembered from the days of the Red Runners. It was the way in which, once upon a time, Shadow Loomis had entered this log house when a Red Runner had taken refuge in it and locked the door. I sped toward the large stone fireplace and dodged under. Up the protruding stones of the chimney I climbed until I was out in the sunshine once more, and there upon the roof I rested until I heard the voices of the Scorpions inside and the door slammed shut. Then I let myself down gently on the outside stones of the chimney, until I stood on the ground. Before I could start for the big log gate of the stockade a figure came around the corner of the log house. It was Guy Malapo.

"They never knew you were in the place," he whispered. "Go before they come out. You and I shall meet again."

Which we did.

XV

The Counterfeit

WHEN I returned to the clubhouse after supper, Stanley Malapo already was there. Perry Stokes was entertaining him. He was showing him the blackboard, on which Lew Hunter had written the words of the new song he wanted to practice. Leave it to Perry to acquaint a new member with all there is to learn about our old hang-out place.

I told Shadow to start a game of dominoes with Perry and Stan until the other boys came. I had a little writing to do—the minutes of the meeting the day before.

Hardly had I dipped my pen in the ink when there came such a rapping at the door that I fairly jumped, and the pen flew out of my hand and stuck point up in the wooden rafters.

"It's Cheeky, sir!" yelled Perry, who had leaped to a front window. "He and his whole band of Scorpions, sir, out by the trees. They are holding torches—"

"Lock the door, Perry!" I called sharply. But too late! Yes. Already Cheeky's hand was lifting the latch. And the next instant I saw his yellow-haired head.

"Aha, Hawkins!" he sang out, with an evil grin upon his ugly face. "May we come in? Sure we may. Come on, Guy. Tell the others to wait till we want 'em."

Behind him came Guy Malapo. He didn't see his brother Stanley. I had stepped in front of Stanley

and shoved him behind one of the curtains that hung in the doorway to my writing room.

"Well," I said, "what do you want?"

"He-he-he!" laughed Cheeky. And then for the first time I saw what made his grinning face so evil-looking. He had lost all his front teeth but one lonesome snag that stuck out of his lower jaw and one yellow tusk that curved from the opposite side of his upper lip. "He-he! What do we want? Seckatary Hawkins, you are smart enough to know. We want you, of course. The blacksnake whip for you, Seckatary Hawkins. I want to wind it around your back until you feel its sting—"

"Stand out of the way!"

Guy Malapo stood forward. He flung the yellow-haired Cheeky aside.

"I want the coin, Hawkins," said Guy. "I'll have no fooling. I want that Chinse coin you have. Don't stall around. You know what I mean. The bad-luck coin; that's what I want—"

"I haven't got it," I broke in. But he shook his head impatiently.

"They told me you lied," he said. "I was foolish to believe that story. Hand it over, or I'll hand you over to Cheeky and the blacksnake whip."

I smiled up at Guy Malapo.

"You are a fine one," I said to him. "I am proud of you, Guy Malapo."

"Cut it out," he said impatiently. "Answer me. What will you do—give me the coin, or take the whip?"

"Guy, I haven't got the Chinese coin," I said. "I told you the truth. It was stolen from my desk. Somebody broke into this clubhouse and—"

"Don't give us that!" broke in Cheeky. "Don't let

him get away with that stuff, Guy. Turn him over. Let me have him. My ol' blacksnake whip will git that Chink's money for you quicker than all your talkin'—"

And while he was speaking I felt a hand shove something into mine—into my hand that I held behind my back. I knew it was Stan Malapo I was shielding. Stan was hiding in that curtain behind my back. It was he who was now shoving into my hand something, and as my fingers closed around it, I knew it was a Chinese coin. I could feel the square hole in the middle.

"Bring 'em out!" came a cry from the circle of torches outside, the light of which we could see through the windows.

"All right," said Guy Malapo, stepping aside. "It's your next move, Cheek. Take 'im."

"Hold on a minute," I said. "If I give you the Chinese coin, Guy Malapo, if I give it to you, un'erstand, will you take this gang of yours away from our river bank at once?"

He stepped up again quickly, eagerly. He held out his hand.

"Give me the coin," he pleaded. "I need it to save my life, I do. God help me, I need that Chinaman's piece of money, Hawkins. Do you think I would stand here and beg you for it if I didn't? Give it to me, and I'll do anything you say."

I looked at his outstretched palm. It trembled. Slowly I drew from behind my back the right hand that had rested against the curtain behind which Guy's brother was hidden. I held up to the light the coin that had been thrust into my hand. By Golly! it was the Chinese coin.

"Here!" I said shortly. "Here is the coin, Guy Malapo."

Oh, boy, how he grabbed for it! He clawed my hand for a minute before he really got hold of it. He looked at it carefully and held it up to the oil lamp on the wall of the clubhouse. Then he gave a glad cry and turned to me.

"Take it," I said quickly. "Take it and get out of here before my pals come."

Cheeky's yellow, ugly face showed his disappointment. He really expected the pleasure of whipping me with his old blacksnake whip. But no one would ever whip me with that wicked thing again as long as I was able to know what was going on.

. . . . . .

It was lucky they went when they did, for our boys came immediately after they were gone. Neither Shadow nor I said a word about what had happened. But the evening went off nicely. There was no return of the Scorpions. At least I had to give Guy Malapo credit for sticking to his promise. But after all the boys were gone and Perry was locking up the clubhouse, I walked up the river path to the main road with Stan Malapo.

"You had the coin," I said to him. "You had the coin all the time, Stan, and it was stolen from my desk. You stole it yourself. What an awful thing! And you a new member."

"No," he said, "I did not steal it."

"But you had it," I said, "you had it—"

"But it was not the same coin, Hawkins," he said. "It was not the real coin. It was Chinese money, sure, but it was not the coin Guy is looking for. It was a coin that I had from a long time ago."

We walked a few steps in silence.

"You gave it to me," I said, "to get rid of Guy—to

make him believe he was getting the coin he thought I had—to save me from the blacksnake whip—"

"That is why I gave it to you," said Stanley Malapo.

"H-m-m!"

We walked on a few more feet and reached the main road, where we waited for Perry. He was slow in coming, but finally we saw the dim shape of his figure against the evergreens.

"Well," I said, "you did me a good turn to-night, Stan. But believe me, we are going to hear the rest of this story pretty soon."

Which we did.

XVI

The Last of the Scorpions

"YOU are our best spy now, Stan," I said to Stanley Malapo, the newest member of our club, "and you know the only reason most of the boys voted to take you in was because they expected you to help us in our fight against the Scorpion gang."

"Yes," he said in a low voice, "they knew that my brother Guy belonged to the Scorpions. They figured that I would use Guy to find out the plans of the Scorpions and beat them at their own game. Well, I'll do my part. I'm going to spy out everything I can about the Scorpions, first place, because I don't like that gang. It is a bad bunch and ought to be broken up. The second reason is, I don't want my brother Guy mixed up with 'em. I'll do everything I can to save him, Hawkins. He ain't a bad kid, Guy ain't. I figger I got to stick up for him, anyway."

"Why?" I asked softly, although I knew what his answer would be.

"Because," said Stan, "he's my brother."

I sighed as I stood up.

"Yeah," I said, "you got the right idea there, Stanley. I never had a brother. But if I had, I guess I'd be about the same as you: I'd stick to him for no reason at all except that he was my brother. That would be reason enough for me. To-night the sheriff is going to round up the Scorpions. If Guy is in the bunch, he will go along with 'em to the School for Bad Boys. But I'm goin' to help you all I can to get Guy out of that bad gang before it is too late. Here's my hand on that."

He took the hand I held out to him and shook it warmly.

"I'll tell you," he said. "It was bad enough for me when John ran away from home. I never had no peace since John started downhill. Home ain't ever been anything but a place of worry to me—an' ever'body. Pop never smiles at home no more. When mom was livin' it was a happy place, but when she died it was blue. Little by little Pop come 'round to smilin' again at us three fellas. We was all he had left, you see. Then John went away, and Pop never smiled again. And now Guy's gone, just like John, and Pop thinks I'm goin' next. He's worried about me, too, now."

"Stan," I said, "it won't do a fella any good to worry. Somehow everything comes out right in the end. Don't go remindin' your daddy all the time about his other two no-account boys. Make him proud o' you, Stan, and maybe you can make up for what he lost in the other two."

Stanley got up and walked over to the window before he spoke.

"I tried to do my best," he said, gazing out at the sunset, "but I'm done. To-night is my last night at home. To-morrow I'm goin' away, too."

"What!" I exclaimed. "You goin' to show the same streak your brothers did? If you do, Stan, all I got to say is that I'm ashamed of you."

He turned swiftly.

"I've tried to bring the boys back home—to Pop," he said, and now his voice was steady, "and I couldn't do it. John's gone for good. Guy—"

"Not Guy," I broke in. "You got a chance—"

He shook his head and turned back to the window.

"Not after to-night," he said. "You told me your-

self that the sheriff will get the Scorpions—get them all. That will mean Guy goes with 'em. Well, when my Pop hears that—I just won't have the heart to stand by and see it, Hawkins. That's why I'm goin' to-morrow."

"Goin' where?" I asked softly.

"Makes no difference where," he said sadly. "Any place. I guess I can do as good as John or Guy—any place I go. Too bad. I'm sorry. I wish—"

He turned around again and faced me.

"Well," I said, "what?"

"I wish we could make Guy see how foolish he is," he said softly. "Somebody ought to be able to make him see it now before it's too late; now, before the sheriff gets him. If he goes up to the School for Bad Boys, it's goin' t' break Pop's heart, that's all—"

Then the tears came. Stanley couldn't stand it any longer, you see. And oh, boy! I felt sorry for him, too. Stanley Malapo's tears were too much for me. I stood up and put on my coat.

"Stop crying," I said, as I reached for my cap. "That won't do any good. You and I have got to take a hand in this business, Stanley. Get your cap and come on."

"Where you goin'?" he asked, brushing his wet lashes with his sleeve.

"Bless me, boy, I don't know yet," I told him, "but something tells me to get up and go and to take you along. Come on. We will follow our noses. Get your han'kachiff out and dry your eyes. My goodness, Stanley! That ain't a way for a fella like you to carry on. Now buckle up and follow me."

We went out. I locked the clubhouse and led Stanley down to the river. My old faded red canoe lay bottom

up on the landing. We shoved into the water and paddled downstream.

"You're goin' to the island?" asked Stanley.

"To the log house on the island," I said. "That's where the Scorpions meet. I'm going to bring Guy back with me. He shan't be there when the sheriff calls to-night."

"You will have to fight him," said Stanley, with a worried look. "He won't come if you just ask him. I tried that. He'll make you fight."

"I'll fight," I said, as I swung my paddle viciously. The canoe shot ahead like a live thing. "Don't you worry none, Stan. You an' I been talkin' about this thing so long I'm ready to fight two like Guy. And by Jinks! I'll take him back if we have to carry him."

Stan was silent for a few more strokes. We passed Hobbs Ferry. Then—

"He used to like this old place," said Stan. "Me and him used to come down here for walnuts. Once he beat me when the sack was too heavy and I couldn't hold up my end. But I didn't care. He was good comp'ny, Guy was. I liked him."

"Get all that out o' your head!" I said, savagely, without turning my face. "Don't you let yourself get soft-hearted when I start in. I'm goin' to whip the daylights out-a Guy just to get him back to his senses. We'll take him back home, you and me, Stan, and maybe to-morrow, when he finds out all the other Scorpions went to the School for Bad Boys, he will be glad we did this for him, even if he did have to take a good whippin'."

"You are sure you can whip him?" asked Stan softly, a tone of doubt in his voice.

"If I wasn't sure of that," I said, "I wouldn't be on

my way down here. Pull sharp. Hold down your paddle. Here's the island."

It was getting dark and we had trouble finding a solid landing. Once Stanley slipped in a snake hole and cried out, but I was around to him in an instant and clapped my hand upon his mouth.

"No noise," I whispered harshly. "Do you want the whole gang out on us?"

On we pushed, until we stood at last before the stockade. Together we stood and looked at the little log house in the center of the enclosure. There was a light in the window.

"I better go up first," I said to Stan. "We must know how many of the Scorpions are in the log house before we decide how we will get your brother out."

I crept up slowly and peeped through the window-pane. Not a soul to be seen in the room. Only a table, a book spread open upon it, and an ink bottle with a pen sticking out of it; beside the table a broken-back chair, and from the ceiling a hanging oil lamp that threw a feeble light across the floor. I turned and motioned for Stan to come on. When he was beside me, I said:

"Stan, I'm afraid we haven't got a chance. Nobody home, you see."

Stanley peered through the window. As he did so I noticed upon his strained features a ray of hope still. Stanley Malapo had great faith in me, which I didn't realize at the moment, even when he turned and said:

"You will not go until he comes, will you Hawkins? You will not leave me here alone? For if you go, I shall stay. I must see him. This is the last chance."

"Don't let's talk any more," I told him. "I wouldn't leave you, Stan. I'll stick to you to the finish. Come on, let's see if we can find out anything."

"WHAT WAS THAT?" WHISPERED STANLEY.

I lifted the latch and swung the door slowly inward. Together we held our heads within the gloomy room, and as we did so there came a sound.

We both drew back quickly, and I drew the door softly shut again.

"What was that?" whispered Stanley.

But I didn't answer him. I knew that the sound we had heard was not the sound of danger; it was the sound of someone in need of help—it was a low moan. I shoved the door open again and went in.

"Who's here?" I called out, flashing my electric light around the walls.

In answer there came only the same low moan, and the ray of my flashlight came to rest upon a strange-looking figure in the corner—a sorry-looking figure hanging by his wrists from a rope tied to a hook in the roof logs, his head bowed, his shirt torn to ribbons, and the bare back wrapped with what seemed to be red cords.

"Good heavens!" I could not suppress the exclamation that came to my lips. "Quick, Stanley, give me a hand here!"

We rushed to the corner. I pulled out my pocket knife and in a few moments had cut the rope that held the poor fellow and he fell in a huddle upon the floor, moaning. I reached down and pulled back the kerchief that was tied across his mouth. By Jove! It was Guy Malapo!

I heard a cry as Stanley fell upon his knees. I stooped beside him to unwrap the red cords around Guy's back, and then my heart gave a sudden jerk as I saw that they were not red cords; they were red welts—lashes from a whip, cut deeply into the white skin.

"Guy!" cried Stanley. "Who did this thing? Talk to me, Guy!"

"The coin!" moaned Guy Malapo. "The coin—the wrong coin—Hawkins gave it—wrong coin. Mui Fong knew—he knew. Can't fool Mui Fong. He thought I was holding out—can't fool Mui Fong—wrong coin—can't fool him—"

His voice trailed off in a low moan. But I understood. The coin that Stanley Malapo had slipped to me when I was in danger was not the coin that Mui Fong was after. Guy had not noticed the difference; had given it to the Chinaman. And Mui Fong thought Guy was holding out, and had punished him with these cruel lashes. I stood up and my foot touched something. I gave it a kick across the room and turned my flashlight upon it. It was the blacksnake whip.

"Listen!" said Stanley suddenly. There were sounds outside. Noise, footsteps, shouts. Voices of boys, and men in pursuit.

I turned swiftly.

"Quick!" I said to Stan. "Lend a hand here." Together we lifted Guy Malapo, I taking his shoulders and Stanley his feet. I backed toward the fireplace. We laid down our burden, and I climbed quickly up the projecting stones inside the wide chimney. Stanley did the heroic thing. Although his brother was bigger and heavier than he, Stanley lifted his limp figure until I could grasp it under the armpits. The next minute Stanley had climbed up beside me and had taken hold of his brother. Together there Stanley and I, we held Guy Malapo, the three of us hidden in the wide chimney of the old log house, while we listened to the racket going on below.

"It's the cops!" came Cheeky's voice. "And look! Guy Malapo's gone. I bet you he snitched on us because the old Chinaman did him up. Hurry on, you

fellas. Lock the door! Lock the door! It's the cops, I tell you!"

But although we could not see what was going on in the room below us, I knew that they did not get the door locked in time; because the next thing we heard was the sheriff's voice, and his words came booming.

"This whole gang is under arrest. I am the sheriff, and I take you in the name o' the law. Don't make any fuss, because I got ten good men right outside the door waitin' to grab you."

They made some fuss, all right, but in the end all was quiet below. Together Stan and I worked our way down into the wide fireplace, taking care not to let Guy Malapo get hurt. The room was empty. We laid Guy down on the floor of the log house, and I sent Stan with my kerchief to get it wet. He came back in quick time, and I folded the wet cloth and laid it on Guy's forehead. His eyes opened and he saw me bending over him.

"Hawkins?" he murmured plaintively.

"Yes, old-timer," I said. "I sure came in the nick o' time. But you got to thank your little kid brother. If it wasn't for him, we wouldn't be here now talkin' to you like this, either."

"Good old Stan!" he muttered, and his eyes closed again. Stanley bent down and took his wrist.

"You got kicked out o' the Scorpions, Guy!" he cried. "And so we come and got ya. You ain't got no gang any more, Guy. You'd best come home with me now. Pop said he would be a-waitin'."

Guy didn't seem to hear. Stanley turned to me.

"Let him rest," I said. "As soon as he comes round we'll take him home. We needn't be in a hurry. We've seen the last of the Scorpions. We saved him, Stan."

"Thanks to you," said Stan, and there was a tremble in his voice. "All our troubles are over now."

"Don't kid yourself," I said. "Our troubles won't be over until Mui Fong gets that coin back. Stan, we've got to find that coin somehow. We've just got to search until we find it."

Which we did.

XVII

Two Strange Visitors

RIGHT after school to-day we held our regular meeting in the clubhouse. Every boy was in his chair except Little Sam.

"Where's Sam?" asked our captain. And Johnny McLarren got up and said:

"Perry Stokes has something to tell you fellas. He told me, but I'd rather have him tell it to you all."

All eyes turned on Perry as he stood up.

"Little Sam resigned," he said. "I met him as I was coming down the river path. He was with Guy Malapo. And as soon as he sees me, Little Sam runs up to me and says: 'Tell Hawkins and the others that I am not a member of the club any more. I'm goin' to be pals with my old friend Guy Malapo again, because he needs me, Guy does.' And that's all he said, and he went away with Guy. They walked up the path toward the cliffs. I was afraid to follow 'em, sir, 'cause Guy Malapo stopped several times to look back. I hid behind the bushes and followed 'em to where the bushes stop growin' and then I came back here. But they were headed for the Cliff Cave, sir."

"I think I ought to explain a few things," said Stanley Malapo, getting up and speaking in a soft, slow voice. "Seems like I am the one who's bringing all this trouble, and maybe I ought to resign instead of Little Sam. He's helping my brother Guy, Sammy is. Guy don't like this club. He's got it in for us, and him and John fightin' all the time, they are bound to bring

us more trouble. John, my oldest brother, he run away from home three times now. I ain't afraid to own up to it, because he is my brother, too, John is, just like Guy. And it was John, in the first place, who got the Chinese coin from Mui Fong on Halloween night for spyin' on this clubhouse. I was with him, and so was Little Sam—the three of us. John gave me the coin, and a few days later told me to take it to a certain place, where I would get a dollar for it. I was afraid to go. I told my brother Guy. He took the coin and went. That was the first time we met the Scorpions and Seckatary Hawkins."

"Yeah," I said, "we saw Guy give the Scorpion gang the coin. Then when the Scorpions wouldn't live up to their bargain and give Guy a dollar for it, Shadow and I took a hand in the fight—"

"And they got the best of us and tied Hawkins to a fence post," said Shadow Loomis with a grin. "Then they put the coin in Hawkins' pocket and a note alongside for Mui Fong which said, 'Here's the fella you want, and in his pocket is the coin.' They figured Mui Fong would get the coin. But you fellas got down there and set Hawkins free before Mui Fong came. That's how Hawkins came to have the coin. Ain't that right, Hawkins?"

Blam! Our captain's wooden hammer hit the table with a bang.

"What's all this got to do with Little Sam resigning from our club?" he yelled.

"Just this," I said, kicking my chair from under me and standing up: "Little Sam is going to help Guy Malapo find that Chinese coin. And believe me, Little Sam is smart. That's what every boy in this club should do—try to find that old coin; get it back again,

so that we can return it to Mui Fong and have peace. As long as that coin was around, Little Sam was always willing to help anybody. Guy got him to help get back the coin. After all this trouble is over, Little Sam will come back to us. I make a motion that we don't rub Sam's name off the list until we know some more about this business. Somebody second that motion, for goodness' sake, and let's get this meeting ended."

"Second it!" yelled Johnny McLarren.

"Motion made and seconded," said our captain. "All in favor—"

They all were.

. . . . . .

I went back into my little writing room and got out my book and the pen and ink. The other boys all went out with Bill Darby to practice baseball, for it was the middle of March and spring was in the air.

My writing room gets dark early in the evening. I had to light my little old oil lamp. Just as I had put the lamp chimney back on I heard the door open and slam shut quickly. I got up and walked to the curtains that separate my writing room from the meeting room. There was a boy at one of the front windows looking out. He seemed to be afraid of something.

"Hello!" I said sharply.

He turned like a flash, and the look on his face reminded me of a scared rabbit. It was John Malapo, the no-account brother of Stanley. And what a sorry-looking sight he was as he crouched there by the window looking at me! His clothes had come out of some rag bag, his face dirty, and his hair straggling about his forehead as though it hadn't seen a comb in a month of Sundays.

"You know me?" he said in a low voice.

"Yes," I told him, "I know you. You are John Malapo."

He gave a little cry of satisfaction and ran over to me.

"I'm glad you remember," he said, gripping my arm. "You and Shadow Loomis had supper with me at my camp fire one night. I treated you right—"

"Yes," I said with a little smile, "and one good turn deserves another. I've been waiting for a chance—"

"You can do me a good turn if you will," he cut in, speaking rapidly. "It's about Guy, that good-for-nothing brother o' mine; it's about him that I come. Not because I would do it for him, you see, but because Stanley likes him—"

"Stanley likes you both," I told him. "He is a member of our club now—"

"I know," he said, with an impatient motion of his hand. Then he suddenly stopped short and, turning, he sped again to the window and, crouching down, he peeped just over the sill and looked out into the darkening shadows on the river bank. Then he got up and came back to me.

"You seem to be nervous," I said; "you seem to be afraid of something—"

"No," he said with a little laugh, but it was a forced laugh, "I'm not afraid, but I always aim to know my surroundings. You will do me this favor, won't you?"

"Yes," I said, shoving my hands into my pockets and walking over to the window where he had peeped out. I looked at the river, fast fading from sight in the gloom of the evening.

"Don't stand at that window!" he called shrilly.

I turned a questioning face toward him, and then slowly walked back to where he stood.

"What is it?" I said, looking him straight in the eye. "Tell me what you're afraid of, John."

"I'll tell you," he said. "Come back here where nobody can see us."

I followed him into my writing room. The light from the little lamp on my desk threw his shadow like a black giant against the wall. He turned and faced me.

"Now," he said, "I'll tell you. I want you to tell Stan. You fellas are all in Dutch. You got to get out o' this trouble as fast as you can. I know more'n you think I do. I know all about Guy, too. He double-crossed me, his own brother. It ain't him that's brought me; it's Stan. Stan's been a good brother to me. Can I see him for a minute?"

"Yes, I think so," I said. "If you will wait here I will go down to the hollow and get him—"

At that moment there came a pounding on the door. John Malapo caught my arm.

"Not now!" he said hastily. "I've got to go right away. Here, you give this message to Stan. He will understand it."

He thrust into my hand a small packet. There came again the pounding on the door. John Malapo ran to the window behind my desk, and in a flash had raised the sash and was out and gone as silently as a cat. Once more came the heavy knock at the door. I dropped the packet into my desk drawer and pushed it shut with my knee. Then I went to the door and threw it open wide.

A strange figure stood there on the porch. He was a boy about my size. In one hand he held a long stick, and at the top of it I saw the lamplight glisten on a blade. He was about the ugliest boy I had ever seen,

and his fingers were long and crooked, and his finger nails were three inches long, like twisted hooks. Believe me, I knew him now. He was the Spider, that Jeckerson the detective was looking for. If I could capture him Jeckerson would give a reward of twenty dollars.

"Won't you come in?" I said, as he stood there looking at me with his beady eyes. "I am alone. No one here—"

"Then I won't come in," he said. "I was looking for somebody. I chased him down to the river bank, and I thought he came in here. He certainly came up this path—"

"There's no one in this clubhouse but me," I broke in. "You may look for yourself."

He turned his head to one side and peered over my shoulder at the room within. Then, as if he feared I was trying to trap him, he backed away.

"No," he said, "I don't think I'll come in. Sorry I bothered you." He turned away, but when he was halfway down the steps he turned to look back. "You know who I am?" he asked.

"They call you the Spider," I told him, nodding.

"Well," he said, "they could call you that and not be wrong much. You surely tried to make me play the fly when you asked me into your clubhouse. Ha! You don't catch me that easy, Seckatary Hawkins."

He went down the steps, and it seemed to me that he paused there in the gloom for a few seconds. Then, although I could not be sure about it, there seemed to come from somewhere afar off the sound of a gong—one single tap on a deep-toned bell. And immediately the Spider turned right about and sped like a shadow into the trees.

Slowly I closed the door and shook my head and,

smiling to myself, I made my way back into my writing room. I took out the little packet John Malapo had left and laid it upon my desk. With clumsy fingers and nervous I unwrapped the paper. There was another packet wrapped in brown paper. I undid that, and still there was a wrapper of white tissue paper bound round with a little red string. It reminded me of the pretty packages at Christmastime. I hurriedly untied the red string, unfolded the paper, and there—

"The Chinese coin!" I exclaimed. By Jinks! There was the bad-luck coin come back to me. Oh, boy! After all these days it had come back to bring me trouble.

"Hawkins!" came a call from the porch.

But I did not move. I sat still in my chair, gazing dreamily at the coin upon my desk. Shadow Loomis came in.

"You heard me call," he said. "Why didn't you answer me?"

"Because," I answered, and I motioned toward the coin, that lay in its many wrappers spread out beneath it. Shadow bent over and took a squint at it. Then he gave a low whistle.

"Oh, boy!" he said softly. "You've got it! Hawkins, you've got the real coin. Let's hope it won't bring us more bad luck."

"We're going to do better than that, Shad," I told him. "We're going to make it bring us good luck from now on."

Which we did.

XVIII

Stanley Tells a Strange Story

THE meeting in our little shack on the river bank on Saturday morning was called to order at ten o'clock.

After the roll was called, our captain asked if anybody had anything to say. And it seemed that nobody was going to say anything, when Stanley Malapo got up.

"I don't want you fellas to think I'm trying to scare you," he said, "but I've got to tell you something that won't make you laugh, either."

"Well, said our captain, "go ahead and say it. We're listening."

Stanley paused to look around at the faces of the boys seated at the table. Then he said:

"The Chinaman is here!"

"What!" exclaimed our captain, and he jumped to his feet. Almost every boy in the club was out of his chair and staring straight at Stanley Malapo. "Do you mean Mui Fong?"

"How do you know?" asked Shadow Loomis, who happened to be sitting across the table from Stanley. "Did you see him yourself, or did somebody just tell you that—"

"I did not see him," said Stanley quietly, "and nobody told me. Pop and me, we went to bed early last night, 'cause Pop's been workin' pretty hard, and we two bein' in that big house all by ourselves, now—"

"Where's Guy?" I asked. "Doesn't your brother stay at home any more?"

"No," said Stanley. "He stayed home just a week. He promised Pop he would be a different boy, and all that, but somehow it ain't in him, Hawkins. He's just like my brother John. They're a couple o' bums, and it's no use to kid ourselves about it. Pop and I talked that all over. Pop said he give 'em up. He told me I was the only one he had to stand by him now, since Guy went away just like John did, and so I told him I would stand by him."

The boys were silent as Stanley paused. It seemed nobody wanted to interrupt him. They liked to hear him talk about "him and his Pop."

"Well, Stan," I said, "you were going to tell us——you remember what?"

"Oh, yes," he said. "Last night we went to bed early, and I guess I was in bed about a couple o' hours, maybe not so long, but anyway, it seemed to me that I heard footsteps down on the gravel walk below my window. I sat up in bed and listened, but I didn't hear any more, and I thought I must have been dreaming, so I laid down again, and pretty soon I woke up again, and it was the same noise—soft footsteps on the gravel walk."

"What kind of footsteps?" I asked.

"Soft ones—"

"Sort o' slippidy-sloppidy, like somebody wearing felt slippers?"

"That's it. And I was goin' to call to Pop—he sleeps in the room next to mine—but I listened for a long time before I made up my mind to call, and then, when I didn't hear the footsteps again I went back to sleep."

"You are sure you weren't dreaming?" asked Shadow

Loomis. "If I'd 'a' heard sneaking footsteps like that under my window, dern if I could ever have gone back to sleep again."

"I know I slept," said Stanley, "because the next time I was awakened suddenly by a knocking."

"Where was the knocking?" I asked.

"Well, at first I couldn't just tell where the sound was coming from. It was very spooky. I thought of ghosts, sure enough, but somehow I didn't believe it was ghosts."

"What did you do?" asked our captain. "You didn't just lay there shivering and waiting for something to happen, did you?"

"No," said Stanley with a little smile, "I wasn't shivering. I was just listening. You know, a fella can do more by listening. If you put two and two together, you can figure out what is making the noise. You see, sometimes a sound is made by something different than what it sounds like. There is an old tree growing close to our house. I thought maybe it was the wind swinging a limb of the tree against the house, or it may have been something hanging on the wall outside, you see, like Pop's big thermometer. When that sways in the wind it knocks on the wall just like—"

"Oh," broke in Shadow Loomis. "So that's what it was, huh? Well, what's the use of tellin' us this long story if it was only some fool thing like that?"

"But it wasn't any fool thing like that," snapped Stanley. Shadow had got him mad. Stanley glared at Shadow Loomis. "I'm telling you it was the old Chinaman who was knocking at our door last night—"

"Did you go down to see who it was knocking at your door?" demanded Shadow.

"No," answered Stanley. "I told you I sat in my

bed, listening. And as I didn't hear the knocking again, I went back to sleep. I thought the wind had been banging things about."

"Well, then," said Shadow, "how in the world did you know it was the Chinaman? If you didn't get up to see who it was making the noise, how could you know? If you went back to sleep without getting out of bed, how did you find out that it was the Chinaman knocking on the door downstairs? Did anybody ever hear of such nonsense—"

"Wait," broke in Stanley Malapo. "I didn't say—"

"But you told us the Chinaman was here—on this river bank—perhaps right at this minute peeping in one of our windows—"

He paused, and as he did so all of the boys turned their heads to look slyly at the windows of the clubhouse—all but Stanley. He stood still, waiting for them to turn back. I caught his eye. He nodded to me and winked.

"Well," said Shadow Loomis, after all the boys had once more turned their attention to Stanley Malapo, "you told us the Chinaman was here. That means for us to be on the lookout. But how could you know? That's what we want to know. If you didn't get up and see for yourself that the Chinaman was knocking at your door last night after you heard all those slippidy-sloppidy footsteps, how did you find out that it was the Chinaman who made the knocking noise?"

"This told me," said Stanley quietly, and he flung a folded paper across the table to Shadow. "It was tacked on the door. I found it this morning when I got up."

"A note!" exclaimed Shadow, opening the folded paper.

"You're right," said Stanley, "a note. It was tacked onto the door. It was the hammering in of the tacks that made the knocking sound on our door last night. And as for me knowing it was the Chinaman who put it there, I'll ask you to read it out loud to the club."

There was a deep silence in the clubhouse as Shadow slowly unfolded the paper that Stanley had thrown to him. Every eye was turned upon Shadow. He moved too slowly for me.

"Let me have it, Shad," I said, and, as if he were glad to get rid of it, Shadow threw it, half unfolded, across the table to me.

"Take it," he said, rubbing his hands. "I want nothing to do with that yellow man. If it's from Mui Fong—"

"It's from him, all right," I cut in. "It's from Mui Fong, take it from me. The poor English shows it, and the style of his penmanship proves it to me. Wait a minute. I'll have to read slow; it's hard to make out—"

"Read it!" ordered our captain. But Dick always figured I could read anything. If he had seen this ugly writing, I don't think he would have believed I could read it. I went slowly, picking the words out of the criss-cross letters that the Chinaman had placed upon the paper:

"*Be warned. Not to be fool. American boy too smart. No want Chinese yen. Give to brother John. Him know how to give back to Chinese man. Else bring trouble, maybe die because not give back which no belong to American boy. Give to brother John yen.*"

"Is that all?" asked Shadow Loomis, when I had finished reading.

"Ain't that enough?" cried Stanley Malapo. "Don't you see, Shadow, that he writes I will maybe die if that coin isn't delivered over to my brother John—"

"You don't have to worry," broke in Jerry Moore. "We boys will stick to you, Stanley. Believe me, we will all stick to you to the finish."

"Thank you, Jerry," said Stanley, "but it won't do any good. No matter what you did, you couldn't beat the Chinaman. John told me. John was the one who got the coin, you see, in the first place. He knows the Chinaman. He did some work for him once, and the Chinaman gave him by mistake this bad-luck coin. Ever since then there's been trouble."

"Well, why in the world don't you give the coin to John as the note tells you to?" said our captain. "Hawkins, haven't you got the coin—"

"I have the coin," I said as I stood up, "but this business has me puzzled. I'll admit that I should have given Stanley the coin, because when it was given to me it was given with the instructions to turn it over to Stanley, here."

"Well, why in the world didn't you do it in the first place and save us all this trouble?" demanded our captain.

"Because," I said, "I knew that whoever had the coin would have bad luck. And I figured that Stanley had about all the bad luck he could stand—"

"That's none o' your business," broke in our captain. "The coin was delivered to you—"

"By Stanley's brother John," I said, "and he told me to give it to Stanley, here. He said Stanley would understand the message that it carried."

Our captain turned toward Stanley. All the boys followed his gaze. Stanley stood up and faced them.

"What was that message, Stanley?" asked our captain. "This ain't a personal question. We ain't aimin' to get out any o' your secrets. But bein' as you're a member o' this club, you got to let us in on anything that might need our help—see?"

"I see," said Stanley, "and, boys, I want you all to know that I do appreciate your help. Only now in this one thing you boys can't help me at all. Better you leave me alone. I've got to get my brothers together. They hate each other, and I'm tryin' to fix it up. They ought to be brothers together—"

Our captain hit the table with his wooden hammer.

"Wait," he said. "Let Hawkins handle this. Then, turning to me, he waved his hammer at me and said: "Finish it. We've got to get out of this."

"I make a motion this meeting be adjourned," I said, and Shadow Loomis, catching my eye and getting my signal, seconded the motion. It carried.

. . . . . .

The boys all filed out, following Bill Darby, who wanted them for baseball practice in the hollow. Only Shadow sat with me, and across the desk from us sat Stanley Malapo.

"Well, Stanley," I said, "you know by this time that the club is with you. Nothing would please us all better than to be able to help you out of your troubles."

Stanley shook his head sadly.

"Not a chance," he said quietly. "You do not know."

"But we want to know," said Shadow, leaning forward across the desk. "Stanley, we are for you, one and all. What was the message that this coin brought? Why did your brother John give it to Hawkins and tell him to tell you that you would understand?"

"I can't talk," said Stanley with a weak smile. "I've got to ask you fellas to trust me. You saw what the Chinaman wrote in the note. I need the coin."

I reached into my pocket. For a second my heart stopped beating. I thought I had lost the Chinese yen. But then I found it, snuggled into the very corner of my pocket. I drew it out and handed it to Stanley.

"Here it is," I said, and then I turned away from him. But he thanked me and I turned back. "Stanley," I said, "I can't help telling you this: that I am sorry I have to turn that bad-luck coin over to you. As sure as I'm standing here, that coin brings bad luck to the person who carries it."

Stanley laughed, but it was a low laugh.

"I am not afraid of it," he said in a low tone. "It must make friends out of two boys who are enemies. I mean my brothers. They hate each other—John and Guy. It's up to me to get them together again."

"Let's hope you can do it," I said. "You'll need us, though, before you're through. And we're all going to stick to you, Stanley, till this thing blows over."

Which we did.

XIX

The Truant Officer

WE HAD just started our meeting, and I noticed that Stanley Malapo was not in his chair.

"Where's Stanley?" I asked. "Does anybody know why he didn't come down to-day?"

"He was down here early," said Perry Stokes, "but he went right away again. He left this. He said for me to give it to you, sir, as soon as the meeting began."

Perry handed me an envelope.

"Another note!" exclaimed Jerry Moore. "Gee! if we don't get more notes than anybody I ever heard tell of. What's it say, Hawkins?"

"It's more than a note," I said, as I glanced at the scribbled words. "It's a resignation."

"What!" yelled our captain, Dick Ferris. "Another boy resigned? Say, we won't have anybody left if we get many more of 'em. Read it out loud, Hawkins."

I smoothed the paper out before me on the table and read:

"*I am sorry to write this, but I must do it. Not because I want to. But I have now got the bad-luck coin—the Chinese money piece that belongs to the Chinaman, Mui Fong. And you boys all know that it brings bad luck. It brought lots of bad luck to our clubhouse already. But now since I have got it, I want to keep bad luck away from you boys, so I will stay away from the clubhouse. I ask you to resign me. I will thank you all the time for taking*

me in your club, and you treated me fine and I am sorry I must quit, but I ask you to resign me.

"Your true friend,

"STANLEY MALAPO."

I looked up as I finished reading, and all of the boys had a rather disappointed look. They all liked Stanley Malapo secretly, although none of them had the courage to admit it.

"Well," said Dick Ferris at last, "I guess we have to accept his resignation, Hawkins."

"You may take a vote on it," I said, "but it doesn't seem necessary. Stanley really is doing this because he thinks it is for the best of the club. He wants to keep trouble away from our clubhouse."

"So you admit that the Chinese coin can really bring bad luck, do you?" asked Dick.

"I'm not admitting anything," I said, "but every boy in this clubhouse knows that the old Chinaman wants to get hold of that coin, and he will not stop at anything. If he thinks the coin is in this clubhouse, he will come here for it, even if he has to break in or maybe hurt one of us."

For a few moments nobody spoke. Then Bill Darby leaped to his feet and said:

"Look here, fellas, now I come to look at it right, that's a mighty nice thing for Stanley Malapo to do—resign to keep from bringing us trouble. I say it's a mighty fine thing for him to do, and I make a motion that we do the same for him we did for Little Sam—keep his name on our list till this thing blows over."

"I second that motion," said Shadow Loomis, who had been sitting quietly by.

The motion carried, and then began a discussion of

what we boys ought to do to show Stanley Malapo how we appreciated his action. Johnny McLarren said he thought we all ought to get together and help Stanley get his two brothers together again, but I said that was out of the question. No use butting in on a brothers' quarrel, I said. I tried it once or twice since we had our club, and believe me, I always got the worst of it in the end. Shadow Loomis said it was up to us to do whatever we could to make it possible for both Little Sam and Stanley to come back into our club.

That being settled, the meeting adjourned, and I went into my writing room to write the minutes. Shadow followed me in. Perry stayed out in the meeting room to clean up and put things in order, which was his regular job.

"Now," said Shadow, as he sat himself down upon my desk in front of me, "I guess the big work is going to be up to me."

"Uh-huh," I said with a nod, "you've got to spy around and find out how we can help Stanley Malapo and get that little simpleton of a Sam Burnham back into our club."

Shadow laughed.

"Don't call Little Sam a simpleton," he said. "You know him better than that. He means well. He is helping his friend Guy Malapo, even at the risk of losing our friendship."

"You're right, Shad," I said, as I picked up my pen and dipped it in the ink, "and we shouldn't blame him one bit. If we want to be true friends to Little Sam, it's up to us to help him do what he's trying to do—"

"Even if he is trying to help one of our enemies?" broke in Shadow.

"Even that," I said, nodding.

Shadow said no more. He sat silent for just a moment; then he got up and walked out without saying another word. And I sighed and turned to my writing.

. . . . . .

Perry Stokes appeared between the door curtains as I was closing my book.

"There's a man on the porch, sir," he said.

"Tell him to come in," I said, and I tried to make my voice sound cheerful, but at the same time I was wondering what was coming now. The man that showed himself between the curtains was a stranger to me. He looked somewhat like our sheriff, only his mustache wasn't so long.

"I am the truant officer," he said, and he didn't crack a smile.

"Yes, sir," I said, "but none of us boys have been playin' hookey."

"Glad to hear it," he said, "but I've been sent—"

"Not here," I cut in. "You haven't been sent here. Old Judge Granbery knows us boys, and he lets us meet in this shack because he knows we don't play hookey and we keep out of trouble. There's plenty o' fellas across the river you might get for playin' hookey—"

"I don't want any except those I'm sent for," broke in the man, "and I've been sent to-day special for one kid named Sam Burnham—Little Sam, they call him. He ain't been to school for a week, and his pop's complained about him not bein' home for five days."

"Oh!" I said, with a little check in my voice. I didn't know just what to say.

"So you know about it, eh?" asked the man.

"No," I said, "I haven't seen him for a long time myself."

"They told me he hangs out in a shack on the river bank—"

He paused. He looked me square in the eye. Then, throwing up his hand, he exclaimed:

"P'raps I'm mistaken. I beg your pardon, boy. P'raps it's the other place. They told me it was a shack on the river, but there's another one—an old house boat hidden in a backwater pool. I'll try that place. Sorry I bothered you."

"No bother at all," I yelled after him, as he hurriedly left the clubhouse.

I went back to my chair at the desk and heard Perry slam the door behind the truant officer. The next minute he was back in my writing room.

"I don't like that man, sir," he said in a low voice.

"Neither do I, Perry," I said with a laugh. "Somehow, it ain't in a fella to like a truant officer, is it? Why is it, Perry?"

"I don't know, sir," he said, "unless it is that most of 'em don't look at a boy's side of it, sir. They always make a boy feel like it's terrible bad, sir, when he stays away from school."

"Well, it is, Perry," I said. "We've got to admit that it ain't right to stay away from school—"

"But sometimes, sir," cut in Perry, softly, "sometimes a boy has a reason, sir, that a grown-up person wouldn't understand, you see. It's that—"

"Somebody's at the door," I broke in. "You must have thrown the lock when you slammed it so hard. Go quick!"

He hastened to the door. The next second Shadow Loomis flew into my writing room all out of breath.

"I've found them, Hawkins!" he exclaimed.

"Found who?" I asked.

"Little Sam and Guy Malapo. They are in the old hidden houseboat—our old secret meeting place down on Seven Willows Island—"

"Good night!" I said. "That's where he's going, then—"

"Who's going?"

"The truant officer, to get Little Sam. Come on, don't ask questions. I'll explain it all to you as we go."

And grabbing my coat and hat, we ran out, down to the little landing, where Jerry's big green canoe lay bottom up. We shoved it into the water and got in, Perry and Shadow taking the paddles, and away we went to Seven Willows Island. I gave Shadow a complete account of the truant officer's visit.

"We've got to beat him there and warn Little Sam," I said. "How was he going, Perry—boat or shore?"

"Horseback," said Perry. "His nag was tied to the porch rail, sir."

"It's a longer way round, then," I said, "and he will have to take the ferryboat at Hobbs Ferry. We will beat him, I think, but he has the start on us. Paddle up, you two."

They paddled until the perspiration stood on their foreheads in half-beads, and we swung into the split of the river and coursed along the west shore of Seven Willows Island until we struck our old camping ground. Here we landed and beached the canoe, and in double-quick time we dog-trotted the beaten path to the old backwater pool in which lay the hidden houseboat, where, in the old days, we held our secret meetings.

The old house boat was falling to ruin, but it was still a good retreat for anybody who chose to take shelter in it. Shadow and Perry fell behind and let me take the lead, as usual. I ran across the narrow plank

that served as a gangway and put my hand upon the knob and turned it. I shoved the door open—

"Hawkins!"

It was Little Sam's voice. And there he sat at a little wooden table, eating bread and cold sausage. Across the table from him sat Guy Malapo. He sprang up as he saw me.

"Well!" he cried. "You're here again, eh? You're a meddlesome fella, Seckatary Hawkins. You just can't let me alone, can you? What—"

"Softly, softly," said Shadow Loomis, pushing from behind me and facing Guy Malapo. "If you're wise you'll talk softly. Seckatary Hawkins is doing you a favor by coming—"

"I want no favor from him!" he cried hotly, waving Shadow aside with his hand.

"But Little Sam needs him," said Shadow.

That got him. Guy Malapo surely cared a lot for his little raggedy companion. He let fall his arm and stepped back. Little Sam came up to me.

"Don't tell me anything has happened," he said. "Seck, don't tell me anything has happened to my daddy—"

"No, you little scamp," I cut in sharply. "By rights I oughtn't have come. But the truant officer is after you for staying away from school—playin' hookey. If he gets you, it's the School for Bad Boys for you. I come to tip you off—"

"Too late!" cried Shadow Loomis, looking through a grimy windowpane. "He's coming up the path, Hawkins."

Little Sam ran over to me and grabbed my sleeve.

"Don't let him get me, Hawkins," he whispered. Anybody but that truant officer—"

"Yeah," I said, "see how you talk now! You never come to me except you want me to get you out of a scrape, by Jinks! I've got a good notion to let him get you."

"There's no help out of it," spoke up Guy Malapo. "Come on, Sammy, don't be a quitter, take your medicine. Don't show these guys you're so weak. We've got to face it, I guess. He's got an order for me, too, most likely. Well, I'm game."

I looked at Guy Malapo and I saw that he was game. There was that look in his eyes that told me.

"I'll get you both out of this," I said, "if you will do as I say."

"The truant officer is getting down from his horse," called Shadow from the window.

"Oh, Hawkins!" cried Sammy, and he was shaking with fear. I never saw a kid like Sam, so brave in everything else, yet so afraid of a truant officer. "Get me out of this, Hawkins, and I'll do anything—"

"Will you go back to school every day?" I asked. "You can come here and see Guy and loaf with him all you want after school, but you must promise that you won't stay away—"

"The truant officer is coming up the gangplank," called Shadow.

"I promise!" yelled Sammy.

"All right," I said in a low voice. "Get up that ladder and be as quiet as you can."

I pointed to the little ladder that led to a space between the ceiling and the roof of the house boat. Sammy scampered up as fast as a mouse. Guy Malapo looked at me, but I motioned him to follow Little Sam.

"Unless you go," I said, "I cannot save your friend."

Guy bowed his head and turned to the ladder. He went up slowly, as if he had a contempt for anything so undignified as haste in a time when somebody was after him. But after he had disappeared through the hole in the ceiling I pulled down the little square board that fitted the opening snugly, making it appear as if there were no hole at all in the ceiling.

"Give me a hand," I said to Perry, and together we grasped the ladder that led to the upper section of the house boat. I motioned to Shadow to open the south window opposite the path up which the truant officer had to come, and together we shoved out the ladder, closing the window after we had done so.

Tap—tap—tap! Three little knocks on the door.

"Come in," I called.

The truant officer came in.

"What!" he exclaimed, on seeing me. "I thought I just left you down at the other shack on the river bank."

"You did," I said, laughing, "but I beat you here. No matter what you would try, I think I'd beat you at it."

"Ho!" he said, blustering, and then he laughed. "You thought you'd warn your friend, eh?"

"What friend?" I asked, acting as though he puzzled me.

"The kid I'm after," he yelled. "You knew what I wanted. I knew the kid I was after was either in the shack you kids call your clubhouse or this place right here. And believe me, I'm going to get him if I have to search—"

"Search," I said, with a wave of my hand. "Search the place if you like. It's our old secret meeting place that we used long time ago. We seldom come down here any more, but we still own it, and—"

"Stand aside!" he said harshly. "By George! I'll search it clean, believe me."

"I do believe you," I said politely. "Please do search it clean."

He went about the poor little one-room boat, and whatever hadn't been ruined by the hand of time with dust, dirt, rust, and all the rest, he finished. He even tore down the poor old curtains that had been hanging in front of the little old cupboard since the Skinny Guy and his pop lived in this house boat. But he never once thought of looking up. No. You see, if that ladder had been standing there, chances are he would have gone upstairs to look above the ceiling at the place beneath the roof. But there wasn't anything to suggest that there was a space above, thanks to the removal of that ladder.

"All I got to say," he said, as he turned at the door, "is this: that if I ever find out that you kids been fooling me—"

"You'll never find out any such a thing, officer," I told him. "Believe me, we wouldn't tell you a lie for the world."

"Bah!" he exclaimed, and he went out and slammed the door. Shadow Loomis watched out of the window until he saw him get on his horse and ride away.

"All right," he said, "he's gone."

We put the window up and took the ladder in and stood it up in its corner. Then I tapped on the trapdoor, and immediately it was opened and Little Sam and Guy came down.

Not a word was said for a few seconds. I looked out of the window and saw the truant officer riding horseback toward Hobbs Ferry.

I felt a tugging at my coat.

"Hawkins," came Little Sam's voice, "you're always good to me—"

"Now you cut that out!" I said, turning suddenly around and pointing a finger in his face. "Sammy, I don't want you to play on my feelings that way. You've got to go to school, no matter what. If you must see Guy, you can come down here after school. If you don't go back to school and stay home with your daddy at nights, I'm done with you."

Guy Malapo stepped out.

"Excuse me," he said, "I shall see that he does that very thing. I am obliged to you again, Seckatary Hawkins."

"You needn't be, Guy," I told him, and I took his hand in mine. "For your brother Stanley we boys would do anything. We would like to see you and Stan and—"

"Hold on!" interrupted Guy with a serious face. "Don't mention his name to me. For Stanley I would do anything, but not for John. I don't like John, and I don't want anybody to ever make me like him."

I shook my head, but I was smiling as I said it:

"Guy, this is a funny world. Just like I saved Sam and you from the truant officer, some day we are all going to save you and John from yourselves."

Which we did.

XX

Down the River

OUR school let out at noon on Friday, it being the beginning of Easter vacation. All of the boys were down at the clubhouse right after lunch, and we held our meeting, after which they went out to play on the river.

There wasn't much to write, and I finished and closed my book and put the stopper on my ink bottle and went to the door. As I stood there with my hands in my pockets, I thought to myself that maybe the fish would bite pretty good this kind of weather, it being a regular spring day and the sunshine so bright and warm. And I was just about to turn in to get my fishing tackle when I saw a man come from the bushes of the river path toward me.

"Hello, Seckatary Hawkins," he ssid. "I guess you don't remember me?"

"Remembering is the best thing I do," I said, as I held out my hand. "Good afternoon, Mr. Malapo."

At once the smile left his face and he took my hand and held it.

"My boy Stanley—" he began.

"Sorry he resigned from our club," I broke in. "He wasn't chased away, Mr. Malapo. He wrote out his resignation on paper and sent it in. None of us wanted him to quit. In fact, we didn't take his name off the list. We want him back."

"He wants to come back," said Mr. Malapo. "But

what brought me down here was to see if you could help me—"

He paused and looked at me, but I didn't say a word.

"I thought," he continued, "that the boys—well, Mr. Burnham said that you—he had a little trouble with his Little Sam. He said you got little Sam to go back to school. He was playin' hookey, says Mr. Burnham, and he says he don't think his Little Sam will ever play hookey again. He's cured, says Mr. Burnham. And he says you did it."

I laughed and turned away.

"I just scared Little Sammy," I said. "I scared the dickens out of him, that's all."

"Well," said Mr. Malapo, "whatever you did, it's made Little Sam want to get to school every morning before the bell rings. And Mr. Burnham told me that you found Little Sam down in your old hidden house boat with—with—"

He paused and looked hard at me.

"Yes," I said, nodding, "he was there with your Guy. They are very fond of each other, Little Sam and Guy."

Mr. Malapo turned away and gazed out over the river bank. I didn't know what else to say, so I walked back into my writing room and sat down at my desk. Mr. Malapo came slowly in.

"I was wondering," he said, "if you couldn't get my boy back for me, like you did Mr. Burnham's Little Sam—"

"What's the matter with you fellas?" I cut in. "Who's got a better right to go and get a boy than the father? Why don't you—"

"He wouldn't listen to me," said Mr. Malapo

quickly. "Guy and I don't get along well. He wouldn't listen to a word from me. Same way with Mr. Burnham's boy. All his talking wouldn't have got Little Sam back to school. And you went and done it as easy as pie. I don't know how it is, but it's strange how boys do act sometimes to their own fathers—"

"Yes, that is strange," I said, nodding my head, "but what's stranger than that is how some fathers act to their own boys. I've thought a lot about that since I became 'seckatary' down here in this old clubhouse. My pop was never that way to me, and I always treated him nice, not just because he was my daddy, but because I liked everything he did. Sometimes I got mad at him for whipping me, but he never really hurt me. And when I'd get to thinking it over, I'd kind-a figure it out that pop was right. I usually deserved the whipping he gave me. But he always stays the first man in the world in every way, as far as I'm concerned."

"My little Stan is that way," said Mr. Malapo, with a sad smile. "He is different. When I think of John and Guy and then think of Stan, he doesn't seem the same. He keeps me up, Stan does. If it weren't for him I'd have died long ago grievin' over Guy and John."

"Get that grievin' out o' your head," I told him.

"But I want Guy back," he said, holding out his hand. "He's a good boy at heart, only he got in with some bad ones and they steered him wrong. He'll come back to me if you can only do what you did when Little Sam Burnham was going wrong—"

"But Little Sam could take a warning," I broke in. "Don't you see, Mr. Malapo, Guy ain't afraid of you or me or the truant officer or anybody. He's just stubborn-headed, and nobody can change him. You might

have done it when he was little if you'd have done it right, but you spoilt him. You gave him his own way, thinkin' it was doin' him good, when you should have made him do things only one way—the way they should be done. You could have made a fine boy out o' Guy, but it's too late now."

Mr. Malapo's big hand plunked down on my desk.

"No, it isn't!" he exclaimed. "By Jove! Hawkins, you can't change the value of a dollar by painting it over with black paint. And nobody can change Guy by painting him over with a black reputation. Underneath it all he is true blue and good, and I'm goin' to believe that until my dyin' day. You don't have to help me if you don't want to. I just come here to ask you in a nice way. I won't be mad at you if you don't do it. No harm done, anyhow, is there, by askin'?"

"No," I said simply. And without another word he walked out of the clubhouse.

I sat there for a long time just gazing out of the window at the swaying trees, with their new coloring of fresh green, and it finally came to my mind that this was spring—a time when everything changes from its old self into a new and beautiful thing. And don't you know, somehow I got to thinking about Guy Malapo that way, too? All during the winter Guy was doing one bad thing after another to grieve his brother and his daddy; but now it was spring, and maybe there was springtime in Guy's heart, too. It might be that some would think it silly to look at things that way, but anyway, that's the way I was thinking, and when I finished thinking I sort o' smiled to myself and took my feet down off my desk and went to the door and called for Perry Stokes. I had to call a couple of times before I heard his answer, afar off down the river by the cliffs.

In a few minutes he came up the path. Shadow Loomis was with him.

"I'm glad you've come, too, Shadow," I said. "We're going to take a trip down the river."

"Are we?" asked Shadow, raising his eyebrows. "What for?"

"I'll tell you on the way down," I said. "Perry, you get Jerry Moore's long green canoe out—"

"Jerry's got it, sir," broke in Perry. "He's taking a fella down to the island—"

"He knows he ain't allowed to go down there unless we all go," I said. "It'll cost him a fine, and the other fella, too. Who went with him, Perry?"

"Stanley Malapo, sir. Nobody else knows it but me. Jerry asked me not to say anything about it, sir. I promised him I wouldn't, so I hope you won't—"

"You'll get fined just the same as Jerry, then," I said. "You know you had no right to promise that, when Jerry was breaking the rules—"

"But I thought, sir, if I was in his place—if a fella asked you to take him down as a favor, sir, to see his brother who never comes home—"

"Oh!" I said. Then I waved my hand at Perry to stop talking. "We've got to get down there somehow, Shadow."

"Robby Hood's motorboat is at the landing," said Shadow. "Won't that do?"

Of course it would; better than a canoe when you're in a hurry. And in a few minutes we were on our way downstream. I told Shadow of Mr. Malapo's visit. Shadow shook his head.

"Won't do any good," he said. "You can't talk to Guy. Nobody will ever make that stubborn head take advice. He won't reason."

"I'll try," I said, "and then I'll feel as though I've done my part."

"Your part!" exclaimed Shadow indignantly. "What right has Guy's daddy to come to you and say it's your duty to do this for him?"

"It's anybody's duty who can do it, Shad," I said. "If I thought all it took to bring Guy back to his daddy was for me to go down and talk to Guy, I'd feel cheap if I didn't do it."

"Look there, sir!" exclaimed Perry, and he pointed to the left bank. Jerry Moore's canoe, bottom up on the shore! And only half way to the island, where they intended going.

"Land there!" I shouted to Shadow, and he turned the little motorboat shoreward. In a few seconds we were out. "See which way they went, Perry," I continued. "They just told you they were going to the island to fool you. Jerry Moore is a slick one. He has something else up his sleeve."

"They weren't alone, sir," said Perry. "Look there."

He didn't have to tell me or Shadow to look. We saw the footprints. There were about a dozen different prints of shoe bottoms on that bank around the green canoe.

"They had an appointment with some gang," said Shadow. "I'll bet Jerry has been putting something over on us, Hawkins."

"I hate to think it," I said. "I like Jerry, and I don't think he would double-cross us, but I'm afraid you're right, Shadow. Go ahead, Perry. Follow the footprints."

We hurried along the muddy bank, Perry leading the way, our eyes bent on the ground. The turn of the river was but fifty feet from where we had landed, and

turning the bend, we came upon a strange sight. Jerry Moore was tied to a tree. He shouted as soon as he saw us.

"They're duckin' him, Hawkins," he yelled. "Help me loose from this tree and I'll fix 'em—"

But I didn't pay any attention to Jerry. No. What held my eyes was a crowd of Pelham boys on the bank a piece farther on. They had a long board shoved out over the river bank, resting on a log. At the end of the board was a kind of seat, and strapped to the seat was poor little Stan Malapo, dripping wet. Even as we came up, they let him down once more into the water. Oh, boy! it made me mad to see that.

"Come on, Shad!" I called. But Shadow didn't need any calling. He was right behind me, and we raced together until we came up to the Pelham boys. They were laughing and shouting. They didn't see us come up. Shadow hauled off and hit the first boy he came to. It was Briggen, the big bully who was leader of the Pelham gang, and he went over into the mud of the river bank, the most surprised boy I ever saw.

"Come on, Perry, bring up the other fellas. Hurry!" called Shadow, turning round to where Perry was loosening Jerry Moore from the tree where he was tied. With a shout the Pelham boys turned and fled. They really thought we had all of our boys with us.

Both Shadow and I hurried over to the ducking board and waded in the water to where poor little Stan Malapo sat. The board was balanced on the shore end with a large rock so that it just kept the ducking end out of the water. Poor Stan sat there tied to the ducking seat, shivering, his eyes shut to keep out the water from his dripping hair. And as we stood there in the water up to our hips I shivered, too, and I thought to myself

how cold poor Stan really must be. The water was not yet ready for swimming. And Shadow was so mad at the Pelhams for doing this nasty trick on Stanley that he was talking to himself all the while we undid the ropes that held him. Jerry and Perry came up in time to help us carry Stan ashore. All of us got wet to the skin up to our waist. I didn't think at the time what my ma would say. All I thought of was to help poor Stan Malapo. That's what all of us thought. Stan shivered and shivered. Shadow ran up and got the motorboat and brought it down and Jerry Moore gave Stanley his topcoat to cover his shoulders, and we all got in and Shadow started to turn the boat back upstream, but I told him "No." I motioned for him to go on down. The island was closer than home. The thing to do was to get Stan warm and to get our own clothes dry before we went back.

Downstream the little motorboat rattled until we landed at the island, and we struck out for the hidden house boat. Perry and Shadow went on ahead, while Jerry and I supported Stanley between us, and we got him to the house boat in a few minutes. Guy opened the door before we reached it. He had seen us coming.

"What's up?" he called, and his face had a serious look as he saw his brother Stan hanging onto Jerry and me. But we didn't answer him. I had started shivering myself. Carrying Stanley like that, and my stockings and trousers being soaked, it wasn't any wonder I was turning into an icicle myself. We hurried in past Guy at the door and he looked at us strangely. We put Stanley down in a chair by the little stove. Then I turned swiftly to Guy Malapo.

"Make a fire," I said shortly, motioning toward the stove. I would have done it myself, but I didn't see

any wood or coal. Guy hustled outside, and in a jiffy was back with paper and wood and stuffed the little stove and put a match to it. The blaze of the fire leaped out of the stove as he swung the door shut. Then he turned and bent over his brother.

"What's-a matter, Stan?" he asked. Then as his hand rested on Stan's shoulder and he felt his wet clothes, he leaped away without waiting for an answer over to the little cupboard hung with curtains and brought out an overcoat. "Come on, Hawkins, get that wet stuff off him," he said softly. "Poor kid! Fell in the river most likely."

"Yes," I said, as I started in to help get the wet clothes off Stan, "fell in a couple o' times. I'll tell you all about it soon's we get through. I've got to get my own clothes dry. Golly! Who'd ever think water could get so cold?"

Guy Malapo had a lot of odds and ends of ragged clothes. Some of them had been there since the days when the Skinny Guy and his pop lived in this houseboat. I put on a pair of Link's old raggedy long trousers, and Shadow had on a pair of his overalls, and Jerry had to wear a pair of old pantaloons that belonged to Skinny's pop. Perry Stokes refused to put on any, saying only his stockings and shoes were wet, which he hung up on a nail to dry, while he wiggled his toes in front of the stove, which got hot in a hurry, Guy keeping it well fed with wood which he brought from outside.

"Now," said Guy, as he squatted in front of me, "tell me how the accident happened."

"It wasn't an accident," I said. "It was done on purpose." And then I told him how we had seen the Pelham fellows ducking Stanley. They had coaxed Jerry and Stan over to the Pelham shore when they

sighted the long green canoe, and Jerry had gone over. He always was a numskull when it came to figuring out why and what for, and he had fallen for it. As soon as they had 'em on the bank they overpowered Jerry and tied him to a tree, while they ducked Stan. They intended to duck Jerry later, and they would have done it if we hadn't got there when we did.

It took us about an hour, I guess, to talk it all over—all that happened, and all that Jerry was going to do to the Pelhams to pay them back when he got his hands on 'em. But thanks to Guy's hot stove, we got our clothes dry and dressed. Guy was helping his brother Stan get into his clothes, and I buckled my belt and went over to help him. Guy was fastening Stan's waist, and I picked up the coat and held it out. Stan shoved his arms into the sleeves. As the coat swung about him, my hand slammed up against his right-hand coat pocket and I felt something. I shoved my hand into the pocket and drew out something. It was the old Chinese coin, the old coin that had brought me bad luck when I had it, and would bring bad luck to anybody. I slipped the coin out of the pocket so fast nobody there knew I had taken it. But somehow or other I felt that it was bad luck. No matter how foolish I knew it was to believe that, yet I believed it now.

"You will see him home, Hawkins?" Guy was asking me, as Shadow and Jerry went out of the door that Perry held open for them. But I threw up my hands and shrugged my shoulders.

"What a fine thing that would be for me to do!" I said with a little laugh. "It would make me feel like I was taking away from you, Guy, the chance to do your brother a favor—"

"You come with me, Guy," broke in Stanley. It

was the first time he had spoken. "You come home with me this time. I'm freezing. I feel like I'm dying. Guy—please—"

"What'll pop say?" asked Guy in a low voice. "What'll he say if he sees me?"

Stanley turned away from him. But I walked over to Guy and laid my hand upon his shoulder.

"Guy," I said, "if your pop says anything to you, it'll be something you'll be glad to hear. Come on. If you'll go, we'll all go with you."

Which we did.

XXI

The Cave of Wonders

I'VE HAD many strange things happen in my life, and I've had many mysteries to figure out, but this Chinese coin business has me beaten. Here I have the little piece of money upon my desk before me as I write. It is only a little round piece of brownish metal. It has a square hole in the center, with a slight nick in one side. What is the great secret about this little innocent-looking piece of metal? Why are so many people interested in it? Why has so much trouble come about on account of it?

These are the questions I ask myself, and I get no answer. I can't figure this thing out. I've figured out many things in my time, but not this. Every time I have got rid of that old Chinese coin it has come back to me somehow, always against my will, except the last time, when I took it out of Stan Malapo's coat after he had been ducked in the river by the Pelhams. That is the bad luck it brought him, and I thought it was enough for poor little Stan. And I find myself asking: "Why did I take it from Stan's pocket? Why didn't I let him keep it? Because Stan was a friend of mine, did I do it because I wanted to keep him from getting into more trouble? Or because I felt that perhaps this old coin might be worth a lot of money to somebody—"

No. That wasn't the reason. I took it—goodness knows why! Here I have it in the palm of my hand. And Guy Malapo is back home with his pop and his

brother Stan. And Stan is safe now. The bad-luck coin no longer is in his pocket, even though he still thinks it is.

Just after I had finished writing this afternoon Perry Stokes came into the clubhouse.

"Visitors, sir," he said. "Two boys from the Happy Days Club, sir. They are down at the landing. Just came in a motorboat. Jerome and Kendricks, sir—"

"Send them up," I said, laughing. "I'll be glad to see those two birds."

I knew the leaders of the Happy Days boys well. They headed the finest bunch of boys in Watertown. In a few minutes Perry ushered them in. They both shook my hand as if it were a pump handle on a well where the water was deep.

"So," I said, after they had taken seats across from me. "Once more your club calls on our club for help, eh, Jerome?"

"As usual," said Jerome with a light laugh. "As long as things go right we stay up in our clubroom and mind our own business.

"Something unusual has happened then?" I said.

Jerome put his hand into his pocket and drew forth —a Chinese coin.

"Here!" he exclaimed. "Could you believe we could into trouble over this?" He laid the coin down on the desk in front of me. I bent over and took a good look at it. It was a yen, the same sort of a coin as the one over which we were having trouble.

"Good night!" I exclaimed under my breath.

"Listen," began Jerome. "Last Saturday one of our boys named Harry Wills went to the laundry for his father. It was a Chinese laundry up in Watertown. The Chinaman gave him his bundle of laundry, and

Harry paid him with a five-dollar bill. The laundry man gave him his change—"

"Was it a Chinaman who gave him the change?" I broke in.

"Sure. Old Chop Lee. Every boy in Watertown knows the shop," answered Jerome. "Well, Harry didn't look at his change, took the bundle of laundry and the money back to his daddy. His daddy said, 'Wait, Harry. Take this for going on this errand for me.' And he hands Harry one of the pieces of change that he got from the Chinese laundryman. Harry says he saw his father smiling as he handed him the coin. He says he can remember that well."

"And the coin his daddy gave him was this Chinese piece?" I asked.

"You've got it right," said Jerome. "I might have known you'd guess—"

"Now hold on!" I cut in. "Don't let me do all the guessing. I want you to tell me why you think this Chinese coin—"

"The Chinaman sent us a note about it," interrupted Kendricks. "I brought it with me, so it'll save time. Here it is. Read it."

He handed me a piece of brown wrapping paper. I unfolded it and read, in black ink, written evidently with a brush:

"Pray your honorable father have not lost Chinese money give to you by mistake. Wait till call by Chinaman—else you all be sorry—take warning—do not angry Mui Fong—else come down upon you—"

I looked up from my reading.

"What have you done about it?" I asked.

"Nothing," answered Jerome. "We thought of you

first thing. We thought we'd better come down here and ask you how you would handle a case of this kind. It sounds dangerous, don't you think?"

"Listen," I said. "If you boys know what's good for you, take this note you have shown me and do whatever it says. I don't want to advise you, but do what this note says to do. It is better advice than I can give you."

Jerome rose and came over to the desk.

"We are sorry to have troubled you at all, Hawkins," he said. "We thought you might like to know. It is unusual. I told Kendricks you would like to hear about it—"

"I am glad you came," I said, rising and waving my hand, "but don't waste time. Get that Chinese coin back where it came from. I don't know what it's all about, but I know one thing, and that is that you can't get any good luck out of a Chinese coin—"

"If we can help you any time, Hawkins," said Jerome, "just call on us. Come on, Kendricks, let's get this piece of change back to where it belongs. Good-bye, Hawkins."

He swept the coin off my desk with his left hand and extended his right. I grasped his hand and shook it.

"Good-by, Jerome," I said. "Do as I tell you, and lose no time. Good-by, Kendricks."

I followed them to the door and watched them as they disappeared down the river path. It was a bright, sunny day, and I slowly walked out behind one of the porch posts. Hardly had the two Happy Days boys disappeared from sight when I heard a strange rustle in the tree that grows beside our clubhouse. I drew back against the clubhouse door, and as I did so I saw a boy coming down out of the new green foliage of the

tree top. At first I wondered who it could be, but then I saw he was letting himself down with his legs and one arm twining around the tree. In the free arm he held a long stick with a knife at the end of it, making it look like a long spear. I knew who it was now—the Spider!

Swiftly he let himself down, and, without glancing back at the clubhouse, he started down the river path.

"Ho-ho!" I said to myself. "So the Spider has been spying on the Happy Days boys! Well, well. I suppose I'll have to follow him and see what he's up to."

Without going back for my cap, I ran down the river path. Jerome and Kendricks were getting into their motorboat, which was tied to our landing. I saw the Spider lower his spear, and, ducking down, he ran under the landing. I stopped in my tracks, hidden by the evergreen bushes on the river path. I heard Jerome make some remark, and Kendricks laughed. As he did so I saw the hand of the Spider come up out of a hole between the planks of the landing and reach into Jerome's pocket. Jerome never knew that there was anyone near. Neither did Kendricks suspect, but I knew! By Jinks! you can't fool me. I saw the Spider's hand go into Jerome's pocket light as a feather, and it was a fist when it came out of the pocket—a fist that tightly held something it had stolen—nothing else but the Chinese coin!

Swiftly I shot my hand into my pocket and drew out my old bad-luck coin. Thank goodness, I still had it! And by the nick in one of its sides I knew that it was my own. The coin that the Spider had so cleverly stolen out of Jerome's pocket without him knowing was the one the Happy Days boys had brought to show me.

The rattle of the noisy motor told me the Happy Days kids were on their way. I had no more time to

watch them. My eyes followed the Spider, who, thinking he was unseen, was crawling out from under the landing now and slowly making his way up the muddy bank. I let him get a fifty-yard start, then I took out after him. He flew along the muddy bank and got ahead of me. He almost outdistanced me, but finally the rocky cliff path was reached, and then I caught up with him. He trailed the cliffs, ran under the stones we call the Big Arch, and then up a little rise and over the ridge at its lowest point.

Not once did he turn, so sure was he that he had not been seen. He went completely around the cliffs, and once on the other side he turned sharply to the right and ran back. As he disappeared behind the high rise of rock that we always called the "Steps to Heaven," I thought he had given me the slip. When I came up to the corner and turned I was sure of it. I gazed down along the narrow path, but there was not a soul upon it. It was as if he had simply disappeared—as if the ground had opened up and swallowed him.

"Well," I said to myself, "I've got to give him credit. He's too slick for me."

And then I happened to think that straight ahead wasn't the only way a fellow might look. And I turned my eyes upward and around, and believe me, I saw the prettiest sight I ever hope to see.

Smack up against the cliffside there was a huge cobweb, like a giant spider web against the side of the cliff, and against the white, chalky stones I saw the figure of the Spider, climbing up—up—up, like a spider making for the center of its nest.

Sometimes I get so excited that I don't know what I'm doing, and this was one of such times, for I ran wildly over to the wall of the cliff and put out my hand

to touch that giant spider web. I wanted to make sure that it was real; that it was no dream; that I wasn't imagining that I saw it. But as I stretched forth my hand, my eyes told me, too, that it was not a fake. It was a giant spider web, to be sure, but no spider had woven that web; it was a human spider. The boy who called himself by that name, who was proud of it, and living up to it even to such an extent that he had woven for himself against the hillside a huge network of rope—common old ordinary steamboat cable, the strands fastened to jagged rocks, tree roots, and anything that was handy to tie them to.

I grasped the lowest strand and looked up. The Spider had disappeared. He was no longer on the giant cobweb. I swung myself up until my foot rested on the bottom rope, and then I found it easy, climbing hand over hand, foot over foot, up the ropes that made the giant web. Once, when I was halfway up, I paused to look down, and oh! it was so steep, looking against the side of that rocky cliff that I grew dizzy and for a moment feared that I would lose my grip and fall; but I quickly turned my eyes up and began to climb again —up—up—up, until finally I found myself in the center of the web. And there was a hole—an irregular opening in the side of the cliff, just big enough to squeeze through.

I got through, all right, and thanks to the fact that I always keep my flashlight in my coat pocket, I had something to see my way. It was a dark passage. Dripping from the ceiling, I could hear the drops as they fell—every step—*drip*—*drip*—*drip*—and I could feel them on my face whenever I looked up. I had to crawl at least twenty feet before the passage grew high enough for me to stand up. Then I suddenly thought to myself, "What if this thing should suddenly cave in

upon me!" But I didn't let my fears get the best of me. No, sir! Not after coming this far was I going to turn back. I wanted to find out why the queer boy called the Spider had come here. And believe me, I did!

The passage gradually grew larger, and finally I put out my flashlight and listened. I heard sounds ahead of me that made me cautious. I tiptoed the rest of the way, for I saw a greenish light coming from the left, and suddenly there opened to my sight a huge crevice in the cavern wall, and I gazed down into one of the loveliest caves in the whole world. Its ceiling was one great mass of many-colored icicles; its walls were radiating all the colors of the rainbow; its floor was covered with a million sparkling stones and long, spear-like things that glittered like rock candy. Over on one side was a flaming torch that threw forth a weird light. And beyond stood two figures. Oh, boy! Did I know them? Only too well. One was the Spider boy whom I had followed here, the other was the old Chinaman himself, Mui Fong, who had sworn to get me. They were talking together, and the sound of their voices was thrown back and forth in the cavern with many echoes.

"I tell you this is it!" the Spider was saying. He held up something. I imagined it was the coin he had stolen from the Happy Days boys.

"It is not the one," came in Mui Fong's velvety voice. "You have missed again. How often must I tell you that the coin I want has that peculiar mark upon it—"

"But I saw them!" cried the Spider. "I followed them in. I heard them talk to Seckatary Hawkins about it, and when they came out—"

"It is not the right coin," broke in Mui Fong, "and therefore you know what you shall receive—"

"IT IS NOT THE RIGHT COIN," BROKE IN MUI FONG, . . . "AND THEREFORE ——"

Before the Spider could say another word the Chinaman whipped out a long black thing from under the folds of his golden-braided gown and raised it up on high. Before he brought it down I knew what it was; it was the blacksnake whip.

Oh, boy! How it curled around the body of poor old Spider boy! I felt sorry for him then. I am softhearted that way. In another minute I would have run out of my hiding place to help him, I believe, had it not been that a hand was laid upon my shoulder as I started forward and I heard a voice close to my ear:

"Stay here, you fool!"

Now nobody can talk to me that way and get away with it. But I was so excited and nervous. I turned my flashlight back over my shoulder and it lit up the serious face of my best friend, Shadow Loomis.

"How in the world did you get here?" I whispered.

"Followed you when you passed the hollow, of course," he said in an undertone. "I knew you were rushing into trouble when I saw you chase that kid down the muddy river bank. You won't play baseball with us because you're too fat and it's too much exercise for you, but you'll hurry along whenever you get a chance to stick your head into trouble, won't you—"

He stopped talking. The green, flaming light in the cavern beyond us had gone out.

"We'd better get out of here, Hawkins," he whispered. "They don't know we're in here. If they knew we had discovered their hiding place—"

"You're right, Shad," I broke in hurriedly, "and it's Mui Fong in there. He'd be tickled to death to get his hands on me. Come on, let's get back to the clubhouse quick."

Which we did.

XXII

A Cry in the Dark

AT OUR next meeting in the clubhouse I told the other boys what Shadow and I had seen when we followed the Spider boy into his cave.

"Now," I said, "Shadow and I were working for every boy in this club when we chased that Spider boy. Jeckerson, the detective from Watertown, told us we could get a reward of twenty dollars if we captured that kid. He knows something that the detective wants to find out."

"Sure!" spoke up Bill Darby. "We could use that twenty dollars for baseball uniforms this year—"

"But it might get us into trouble," interrupted our captain. "What we must do, Hawkins, is to please old Judge Granbery so we can keep our clubhouse and meet every day—"

"Please him!" I repeated, without giving Dick time to finish. "By Jinks! Dick, if you ever saw the beautiful sight that Shadow and I saw when we poked our heads through that hole in the center of the giant spider web on the cliff! Say, if we could get hold of that beautiful cave—tell old Judge Granbery what a beautiful sight it was—say, he would go crazy over it! It's a gold mine—I tell you—it'll make a man rich. It's the most beautiful cave I ever saw, isn't it, Shadow?"

"I don't know how many others you've seen," answered Shadow with a smile, "but it certainly is the most wonderful underground place I ever peeped into."

"Where is this cave?" asked Johnny McLarren, who

had been listening all this time with a look of doubt upon his handsome face.

"We can take you right to it," said Shadow. "It's on the other side of the cliffs."

For a few seconds nobody spoke. There was a silence in the clubhouse. Then Dick spoke slowly and in a soft tone.

"That sure would please the Judge, I guess," he said. "If it is a place where he could charge ten cents admission to see the most beautiful cave in the world—"

"He could charge more than that," broke in Shadow, "and if he charged a dollar, it wouldn't be as much as it's worth to see that wonder. Why, listen, Dick, it's like a palace of diamonds and rubies and blue and green stones, shining all colors of the rainbow. It's glorious, I tell you!"

Well! Another silence followed. It seemed not a boy in the clubhouse could talk after Shadow's description of the wonders of the Chinaman's cave. None of them ever thought of such a thing. Now it seemed that they were close to something that was as good as a gold mine to them. Roy Dobel stood up.

"My pop's farm is right next to the cliffs—if the cave is on his farm," he said, "by rights it wouldn't be up to us boys to tell the Judge about it. We ought to tell my pop."

"It's not on your pop's place, Roy," said Shadow. "We know, because we were there."

"Shadow's right," I said. "It's back this way after you turn the last of the cliffs, Roy."

"You never can tell about caves," protested Roy. "It all looks different when you're underground than when you're out on top. It might be that the cave you mean is right under my pop's farm. If it is—"

"Well, if it is," spoke up Jerry Moore, "your pop will get it. All we want to do is to find the place first."

"There's caves under my pop's farm," said Roy. "I know it, because I went in one of 'em once. But they ain't nothin' like what Shadow told about."

"The entrance to this place is on the west side of the cliff, Roy," said Shadow. "Your pop's farm is most on the river, on the east side."

"Well, sometimes the hole is on the east side and the cave is on the west side; that is, a fella has to go all the way round to get in, and then crawl into a tunnel and travel in the dark a long ways, and before he knows it he's under my pop's farm—"

"I make a motion," broke in Shadow Loomis, "that we make up our minds to do two things that will help this club and please our old Judge. The first thing is to capture the Spider boy and get the twenty dollars reward to buy new baseball uniforms. The second thing to get the cave of diamonds and rubies and other wonderful shining stones and draw a map of it and turn it over to Judge Granbery, and let him do with it as he wishes."

"Second the motion!" shouted Bill Darby, thinking of the baseball uniforms. He was captain of the team.

The motion carried. There was only one vote against it—that of Roy Dobel, who had a sneaking idea in his head that the cave of wonders might be under his daddy's farm.

. . . . . .

As soon as the meeting ended Shadow and I started to lead the other fellows to the place where we had chased the Spider boy the day before. That is, we thought we were going to lead them there. It was to be an easy thing—only a matter of finding the giant

spider web against the cliff side. Shadow and I led them down the river path, across the muddy space, and onto the stony cliff path and up the rocks, under the stones we call the "Big Arch," over the ridge and around the rise we call the "Steps to Heaven," and onto the narrow path, the ledge against the cliff side.

"By golly, Shadow!" I exclaimed in a low voice, "there is no spider web here!"

The giant spider web was gone! Both Shadow and I scanned the long, white, chalky cliffs that stretched a half mile ahead of us. There was nothing to mar the stony wall that rose at our right hand.

"Well?" called our captain. "Why do you stop?"

"Plenty reason why," I called back, laughing over my shoulder. "The big spider web is gone!"

"Well, you remember where it was, don't you?" yelled Jerry Moore.

We thought we did, but after walking down a half mile along the path, we decided that we must have been too excited the day we had chased the Spider boy. Somehow or other we could not locate even one point where the ropes forming the giant spider web had been fastened. Nor could we discover any hole in the cliff side. Surely there was one. Both Shadow and I had entered it. But though we looked carefully, we could not discover even the smallest hole in the cliff side. Perry Stokes was sent back for our spyglass, and again we scanned the rocks. Each boy took a turn with the glass, but none of them could find an opening.

"Seems it was right here," I said, pointing to some jagged rocks protruding from the cliff side.

"No," said Shadow, "I think you're wrong, Hawkins. It was a little farther on."

"Well, it's a cinch you can't ever hope to climb the

face of this cliff," said Dick, pointing up. "The stones sticking out from the sides of the cliff are too far apart to get hold of and climb. You know, I've got a notion to believe you fellas were telling us one big lie."

"You know me better than that, Dick," I said. "It was here, as I told you."

"I'll stand by Hawkins," said Shadow. "There is nothing to prove our words, boys, but honest to goodness there was yesterday. Just as he told you, so it was."

It comes back to me now, that strange-looking line of boys, standing in single file on the narrow path on the ledge, no one knowing what next to do. You couldn't blame them for feeling hard toward Shadow and me. Yet it was Shadow who had the next idea.

"Well, look here, Dick!" he exclaimed. "This whole cliff is one big mountain. We have two entrances on the other side, haven't we? One, our old Cliff Cave, and the other through Cave River. Come on, let's try that side, and see if we can't find this cave we told you about and prove to you that we were telling the truth."

Nobody having a better suggestion, the order was given to retreat. Hardly anything was said until we reached the point where the path divided, one way to the entrance of Cliff Cave, and the other to Cave River below.

"It stands to reason," said Dick, "that the cave you told us about would be up. No use trying Cave River, then. That's the very lowest, where the water runs. Remember what Brother Jim always tells us—water always runs to the lowest place. So I guess we'd better steer right up for Cliff Cave."

Old Cliff Cave had given us many exciting adventures in our days on the cliffs, the last one so tragic that we had decided to seal it up forever. Which we

did. But "forever" is a long, long time, and neither stones nor sealing up can do what nature doesn't want, and we found the Cliff Cave entrance falling away. There was a hole in it big enough for a horse and wagon to pass through. We all pulled out our flashlights, and Shadow Loomis led the way.

"Come on," he called. "If there's anything in this old cave we haven't seen we'll see it now."

That just goes to show how foolhardy a boy can be. Not that I am trying to make excuses for myself. I was just as bad as Shadow; in fact, I followed right at his heels and the others came after me. Right next to me was Roy Dobel. You see, since we found that we had to come back to the east side to enter the cave, Roy still had an idea that the cave we were seeking would be found under his pop's farm.

Our flashlights were criss-crossing one another in the darkness, but not a word was spoken. Shadow led the way into the first big chamber, then to the narrow passage that took us into the cave where we had chased, many years ago, a boy we called Stoner's Boy. We never called him anything else, because all we knew about him was that he belonged to a man named Stoner. We stood together at last on the edge of the great pit, across which Stoner's Boy used to swing on a rope and laugh at us when he was safely on the other side, knowing that we couldn't follow, because he had the end of the rope, which he would tie to an iron bolt in the cavern wall.

"Well," said Shadow to me, "here we are at the chasm. In order to get to any caves that might be beyond, we would have to cross this gap."

"Which is impossible," said our captain, stepping up and throwing his light along the edge of the pit.

"WE'VE GOT TO USE COMMON SENSE HERE, AND RIGHT NOW, TOO"

"And the way I figure, your wonderful cave of diamonds and other beads is beyond that pit."

"You figure it right," said Shadow. "So unless we can find back the place where the Spider entered on the other side, I think we will never find back our precious cave."

"Why couldn't we," said Roy Dobel, "do what somebody else did?"

"It all depends," I said, "it all depends, Roy, on what somebody else did."

"Well," he said, "Stoner's Boy used to swing across this pit. He got across it, didn't he? Why couldn't we—"

"I got you!" broke in Shadow Loomis excitedly. "By George! Hawkins, I'll bet you the very spike on which Stoner's rope was fastened is still in the rocky roof of this cave somewhere. We can fasten a rope to it somehow. Let's see—"

His suggestion led all of the boys to throw their lights up. Yes, by Jinks! there in the rocky roof of that high cavern was the hooked spike, and from it yet dangled a threadbare bit of rope with tasseled end.

Shadow gripped my arm.

"Once across that dark chasm," he whispered excitedly, "and we will not only find the cavern back, but we will put our hands on the Spider and gather the twenty dollars reward; and not only that, Hawkins, we will lead your detective friend to the Chinaman who has sworn to get you, and you will be rid of that danger forever—"

His words died, frozen on his lips, as there came from somewhere in the dark recesses of that vast cavern a cry—a cry so terrible and so strange—it was as if a ghost had risen and, seeing us, had cried out!

As I sit here now in the quiet of my room writing it down I shudder. For that terrible cry was enough to make the bravest boy in the world sit up and listen. Its echoes still ring in my ears, and the echoes of the cries of alarm and fright that broke from among us. The cry that we heard was not an earthly cry.

"Hawkins," said Shadow Loomis to me, after we had come running back and locked ourselves in the clubhouse, "there is something funny going on around here."

"I know it," I said, "and it's got me scared, Shad."

"Me, too," he said, nodding, "and all the other boys as well. They're out there now, all of 'em, afraid to go home alone. We'd better all go home together."

Which we did.

XXIII

The Ghost Appears Again

EVER since the day we went into Cliff Cave and were frightened out of it by that terrible cry, there has been more or less uneasiness among us boys. We have been meeting regularly every day after school and holding our singing practice in the evenings, but the boys stay pretty close to the clubhouse.

"They're all just plumb scared to death," Shadow Loomis said to me to-day, when we were alone in the clubhouse. "And I might as well own up to it and tell you that I am, too. It wasn't natural—that cry we heard in Cliff Cave, Hawkins."

I slowly shook my head as I said:

"No, it didn't sound natural, that's a cinch. I'm just as honest as you, Shadow, and I'll own up that it's had me feeling pretty nervous myself. Ever since I heard that awful scream in the cave that day—there in the dark, too, you know—well, I've got so that I begin to shake every time I hear the least sound. I turn my head quick to see what's coming. And I'm always expecting to see something that I won't want to see."

"It's the old Chinese coin that's doing it," said Shadow, as he walked over to the window and looked out. "I told you not to have anything more to do with that bad-luck piece. I knew we'd get into trouble again when I saw you slip it out of Stan Malapo's coat pocket."

I swung around in my chair and looked at him. But Shadow continued to gaze out of the window.

"Why didn't you tell me that you knew I had that coin?" I said harshly. "I thought I slipped it out of Stan's pocket without anybody knowing. I didn't want to worry anybody. I didn't want Stan to have it, either. Poor kid, he's had all the bad luck he can stand. So I didn't want anybody to find out I had it. I meant to turn it over to the one who really needs it most."

"No use for us to have a fuss about it," said Shadow quietly, without looking around. "We could have found back the cave of diamonds the day we went for it if you hadn't had that foolish coin about you. But it has scared all the boys—with that awful cry they heard in the cave. Nobody would go near the old place again. You wouldn't see me going near it. I'm cured. I don't care if there's a dozen such wonderful caves under the cliff rocks. I'm not going to try to find 'em."

"Well," I said, slowly swinging back to my desk, "some day somebody will find the cave you and I saw. And it's going to be worth a million dollars, too. Take it from me that's the truth, and some day you'll say I was talking sense."

"Even if you and I did find it again," said Shadow, coming over to my desk, "what good would it do us?"

"We could give it to old Judge Granbery," I said, "and it would make the old Judge feel kindly toward us, Shadow. He would make a million dollars out of it in a few years. We could know then that for the rest of our lives we could keep our little old clubhouse on this river bank and never be ordered away from here—"

"Supposing the Judge took hold of it," broke in Shadow. "How could he claim it? Does he own the ground under which the cave would be found?"

"Nobody owns the river bank," I said, "and most

of the cliffs are part of the river bank, and anyway the Judge could say that no matter who owned the ground, anybody could own the caves under that ground."

"Not if it's under somebody's land," said Shadow. "You're right about the river bank. That doesn't belong to anybody. Rivers belong to Uncle Sam. But suppose the cave we are talking about happens to be under the farm owned by Roy Dobel's daddy, right next to the cliffs, what then?"

"Oh, well," I said, "if it's under Roy's daddy's farm, of course we wouldn't do anything. But say, how would you like to be Roy, if that is true? His daddy would be a rich man in a few years, wouldn't he?"

"Hush!" whispered Shadow. "Here comes somebody."

It was Briggen, leader of the Pelham boys, who lived across the river.

"Say!" he began in a loud voice, speaking out of the corner of his mouth, "what are you guys up to, huh?"

"Not a thing so far," said Shadow Loomis, "but in about two minutes, if you're not out of this clubhouse, we'll be up to throwing you out on your ear—see?"

"Not so fast, you won't," snapped Briggen. "I'm goin' t' git your number, kid, an' I'm goin' to tell you how I'm goin' t' do it, too. Now, don't be too quick. I got some friends outside waitin' to help me if you start anyt'ing, so keep your hands down till you hear what I got to say."

"Well, say it!" I told him.

"I'll say it," returned Briggen, as he turned to me with a silly grin. "An' you guys listen. Us Pelham fellas don't want no fights wit' you guys, but we ain't goin' t' let you scare us, either. You been settin' up a

ghost on the cliffs every night. Ain't we seen it? And don't we know who's a-doin' it? I'll say we do."

I held up my hand.

"Just a minute, Briggen," I said quietly. "Let's talk this thing over sensibly. Let's not get into a fight on account of something that maybe none of us knows anything about. Now tell me this: Just what kind of a ghost did you see on the cliffs at night?"

"Oh, you know, all right enough," laughed Briggen.

"Was it a shape that looked like a horse and rider—"

" 'Course it was," replied Briggen in a low tone, "an' it always comes out on the cliff. I guess you know, all right, all right."

"No," I said, "cross my heart and double cross it. I have seen it, but I tell you the truth, I don't know how it comes about. It is a mystery to me and to everyone in this club."

"Ha-ha!" Briggen's laugh mocked us. "Tell that to somebody who isn't as smart as me. You boys are trying to put something over—maybe not on us Pelham boys, but on somebody else, and I'm here to tell you right now that us Pelhams are goin' to spoil your little game. Yeah, now you see it, eh? We're goin' to get a chanst to git even with you for all the nasty things you did us in the past. I'm goin' up to old Judge Granbery and tell him you fellas are makin' a rumpus of a ghost on the cliffs at night, and ol' Judge Granbery will make you boys sweat, I tell you; and after that, good night to this old clubhouse."

I stepped up to Briggen and I faced him. I shoved out my chin and my hands went into fists. I had all I could do to keep from punching him. Oh, boy! I was mad.

"Listen!" I said. "If you tell that old Judge any-

thing that isn't true, by Jinks! I'll make you sorry for it, Briggen—"

"It's true!" cried Briggen. "Ever'thing I'll tell is true. We watched that ghost the first few nights scared to death. Poor old Ham Gardner, my best pal, he nearly died with hystericals, he's so easy scared, and he believes in ghosts. Ham'll tell the Judge what he saw—what we all saw. We watched it many nights, and then we found out your club was makin' that ghost on the cliffs—"

"Hold on," interrupted Shadow Loomis. "I suppose you have some proof of what you are saying."

"Plenty," said Briggen quickly. "We've got plenty of proof. Every one of my pals waiting outside there is proof. They all saw a fella leave this clubhouse and go away before you other fellas came out. And this sneaking fella hurried through the woods. The first time we saw it we didn't pay any attention; but the second time —oh, boy! Ain't I glad we sneaked after him?"

"Who was it?" I demanded.

"How could we tell in the dark?" said Briggen. "We followed him to the foot of the cliffs, and there we lost him. No wonder. He had the start on us. We had to cross the river in our flatboats first. By the time we landed he was gone. But the next minute we saw the ghost on the cliff—the white horse and rider. Say, when any of you fellas want to scare us to death, you don't have to spring anything like that—"

"Look here, Briggen," I said quickly. "Believe me or not, this is all news to me. But if what you say is true, I want to know it. If you'll give me time to look into it, and if I find out that it is somebody from this clubhouse, I'll go with you and your boys and tell the Judge so, too. We want no foolishness like that in our

club. We have enough trouble now, and besides there is a terrible danger on this river bank. Old Judge Granbery told us that himself. We are all as careful as we can be. I would advise you and your Pelham gang to be the same."

"Don't you worry!" exclaimed Briggen with a chuckle. "We are careful. We been over here a lot of times in the daylight, but you couldn't git us over here any more at night. That fool ghost has scared my bunch all out o' sense. I don't like no ghost stuff, even if it is only somebody pretendin' to be a ghost. It scares me anyhow, so it might as well be a real ghost, and I says to Ham Gardner, 'We might as well get even wit' Hawkins and his gang—' "

"Cut out that!" snapped Shadow Loomis, and he pointed his finger at Briggen. "What bargain can we make with you to keep you away from old Judge Granbery until we can investigate this charge you've brought against a member of our club?"

"Only this," returned Briggen promptly, and I could see that he had had it all figured out in advance: "If you fellas give us leave to come over on the cliffs and we will mind our own business and not butt into your'n, and you won't try any tricks on us and you will let us play on the cliffs and in Cliff Cave and Cave River just like you fellas do, if you will let us do that without fightin' against us, then we will hold off. We won't tell Judge Granbery—"

"That's a go!" I said quickly, because I was afraid Shadow might say something that would cause Briggen to change his mind. I didn't want the Pelham leader to go to old Judge Granbery with his story yet. I wasn't ready, you see. I wanted to be ready to give Judge Granbery an explanation that would free us boys

from any blame in the whole thing. And inasmuch as Briggen had charged one of us with making the ghost on the cliff, I wanted time to think it over and figure it out.

And so Briggen left us.

As he went out the door, Shadow and I walked to the window and looked at the line of raggedy boys that followed the Pelham leader back to the fleet of flatboats tied to our landing.

"You see their game, don't you?" asked Shadow quietly.

"No," I said, "not if you mean something else than what he said. All he has to do is to go up to Judge Granbery and repeat what he told us. That would settle our hash, all right."

"It's not that," said Shadow. "It's not that at all."

"But he claims one of our boys left this shack just a few minutes before the ghost appeared on the cliff."

"But what they really are after," said Shadow, "is the Cave of Wonders. They've heard about it somehow. They want to get it first. They know it is a gold mine to the one who puts a claim to it first."

I turned slowly and looked at Shadow.

"I hadn't thought of that," I said, "but it might be so."

"It *is* so," said Shadow quietly.

"Well, of all the nerve!" I said, slowly.

. . . . . .

That night we had singing practice at seven. Lew Hunter had a new song with a chorus, and he had the words written on the blackboard so we could read it as we sang. And he played it over on the old organ a couple of times, so we could get the hang of it, and then

we tried it. It was the first day of May, and the song was "Wandering in the Maytime," so I guess that had something to do with the way the boys swung into it. But Shadow Loomis and I stood back and apart from the crowd. Sometimes we joined in the singing, and sometimes we both hushed while the others sang—we hushed and held our ears open for some other sound—some sound that might be creeping down upon us from the haunted cliffs.

"Why don't you sing?" whispered Shadow to me, as we bumped our heads in trying to listen both at the same time at the chink in the door. And together we straightened up and joined in the chorus:

"Wandering in the Maytime, sweet it is to rove
Just before the haytime, through the leafy grove;
When the birds are singing sweetly in the trees
And the white thorn sending perfume on the breeze."

But Shadow and I were no longer interested in the singing. We had caught the sound of somebody outside. And glancing at one of the windows, I saw a pasty face pressed close against the pane. For a moment only the lamplight from our meeting room shone on that ghostly face. The next instant the face had disappeared. I turned my eyes toward Shadow. He, too, had seen it. His eyes told me so.

"Come on," he whispered.

Together we silently slipped out of the door and closed it gently behind us. On the porch we paused.

"Be careful," whispered Shadow. "It was a Chinaman's face that was pressed against the window."

"I know it," I said. "Lead on. I'll follow."

Shadow slid down upon his hands and knees to the right, and so into the dark corner of the side porch,

where he let himself down onto the soggy ground, and I was right behind him.

"What now?" I whispered.

"Any tree for a hiding place," he said, "and then watch closely."

Together we crept to the nearest tree that afforded a hiding place. Once I thought I heard a signal; but on second thought I knew I was mistaken. It was but the familiar hoot of the owl that came back every year to its nest in the tree behind our clubhouse. The singing practice had ended. The boys were moving in the clubhouse, getting ready to go home.

"Look out!" exclaimed Shadow.

I looked in time to see the door of the clubhouse open quickly. Somebody else beside ourselves had slipped out unnoticed. For a moment the figure was silhouetted against the partly open door. Then the door closed.

We followed with our eyes as best we could. The figure leaped from the porch and came directly toward us. We didn't want to be seen spying, so we ducked low behind the tree and the boy went panting past us.

"Who was it?" asked Shadow, as we straightened up after the figure had sped by.

"Search me," I said, "but it's one of our boys."

"Come on," said Shadow, "let's follow—"

"Wait," I broke in. "Look out. There's somebody coming up from the river, Shadow."

The river bank grew alive with leaping shapes. Boys they were, and in another minute I knew them for the Pelham gang. Briggen was leading. I tugged Shadow's sleeve and together we ran from behind our tree.

"Ho, ho!" cried Briggen. "Look, fellas! Hawkins

and his smart ellick pal. Goin' t' see your friend pull off his ghost stunt, huh?"

"Look here, Briggen," I said fiercely, for I was excited and mad. "Don't joke with us now. Whoever it is that ran out of that clubhouse, if he is the one who makes the ghost on the cliff, believe me, he is not a friend of ours!"

"Shake hands on that, Hawkins!" said Briggen with a laugh. But I shoved his dirty hand away. For at that moment there came the most unholy shrieking sound I have ever heard, and I have heard many. Not even the terrible cry in Cliff Cave was as frightful as the shriek that rose upon the silent May night.

"Oh, look! The ghost, Hawkins! The ghost!"

I saw it. He needn't have yelled. But Shadow had lost his head. If he had had any sense he wouldn't have admitted that it was a ghost—anyway, not before these Pelhams. But you can't blame him much. There, racing down upon us from the cliff path, was the startling apparition of a horse and rider dressed in white, throwing about itself a silvery light, the trailing draperies from the rider's shoulders looking for all the world like the tail of a comet.

"Run!" yelled Briggen. "Run for yer lives! It's comin'! It's comin'!"

You can't explain that. Nobody can explain that to me. I'm in the habit of figuring out things for myself, and nobody can explain that to me. I mean the way the Pelhams got scared that night. After what they had said—that they knew it was one of the boys in our club that made that spook on the cliff path—even after they admitted it was not a ghost—they yelled "Run for your lives!"

Which we did.

XXIV

The Light on the Cliff Path

"IT WOULDN'T be fair," Shadow said, as he and I sat together on the steps of the clubhouse porch after meeting to-day, "to bring a charge against one of our boys unless we were sure. And for the life of me I can't be sure who it was that came out of our clubhouse and sneaked off up the cliff path that night."

"The sooner we find out about it, the better it will be," I said. "To-night is another singing practice, and you and I will try again. Whatever comes of it, one thing is sure in my mind: We are going to 'can' the fellow who's doing it."

"Don't be too hasty about that," said Shadow, with a shake of his head. "You can't tell what reason he might have. What with this excitement the old Chinaman has brought to this river bank and that beautiful cavern you and I discovered—"

"I wonder why we couldn't find that cave back, Shad?"

"Don't worry about that now. Whoever finds that cave you and I saw is going to be rich for life. After we settle this ghost thing, Hawkins, and after Mui Fong leaves this old river bank, you and I will explore the holes under the cliffs, and maybe we will find that cave of wonders back. If we do, we can give our daddies a job 'tending to it while we sell tickets. But now we've got work to do and we must do it. Goin' down to the baseball practice?"

"No," I answered, as I got up and brushed the seat

of my trousers, "I've got to go in and write the minutes of the meeting."

. . . . . .

At seven o'clock the boys all gathered for the regular singing practice.

Shadow was waiting for me on the porch, and together we made our way down the dark river path and hid behind the evergreen bushes that line the path.

"Well," said Shadow, "here's where we camp for a long watch. It's closer to the clubhouse, and we can see the face of every boy who enters or comes out."

We watched carefully as the boys arrived. First Bill Darby and Johnny McLarren. They were laughing and cutting up. Next, Perry Stokes and Robby Hood. Robby had been to Perry's house for supper. Then came Jerry Moore. He came in a hurry, as he always does, bursting into the clubhouse like a cyclone. And then came Roy Dobel. He carried something. He paused an instant to look through the window of the clubhouse, and then, instead of going in, he went over to the river path and hid something. It looked like a saddle, or something heavy and of such shape. He hid it behind a tree. Then he sped up to the clubhouse.

"Well," I said, as the door closed upon him, "which one, Shadow?"

"Roy," said Shadow simply. "It's Roy, I think."

I whistled, softly.

"What in the world would he want to be doing a ghost stunt for?" I asked, wondering.

"I see it all now," said Shadow, nodding. His eyes sparkled back the reflection from the lighted windows of the clubhouse. "Hawkins," he said, turning to me, "you remember what he said about that Cave of Wonders we discovered—"

"Yeah," I said, "maybe it was under his pop's farm—"

And then I fell silent, too. Both Shadow and I were thinking.

"Look there!" whispered Shadow. "We're not the only ones hiding to-night!"

And he was right. From out of a clump of bushes on our right sprang a dark shape. It was a boy! Surely not one of ours. We had seen them all go into the clubhouse. But whoever it was, he ran over to the tree behind which Roy Dobel had hidden his saddle. We saw the dark shape stoop and lift. Whatever he lifted must have been a bag of some kind, for he upturned it as though he were emptying it. Then he looked around for a moment and ran to another tree, from behind which he lifted—a gun. Yes, by Jinks! it was a gun! We saw him throw open the breech. And then suddenly the sound of the boys singing in the clubhouse began:

"*Wandering in the Maytime, sweet it is to rove*—"

It seemed as if the sound of the boys' voices frightened the dark shadow on the river path. He dropped the gun and fled and in a jiffy was lost in the gloom of the woods.

"Follow him!" I whispered excitedly, poking Shadow, who stood in front of me.

"Follow nothing!" chuckled Shadow. "This is getting interesting. Roy Dobel is sure a smart boy. Let's wait. You'll see more fireworks from this end than you will if you follow that will-o'-the-wisp who is already lost in the dark of the woods. Hear those boys sing! Say, Hawkins, we ought to give a show and make money.

Where could you hear better singing than those boys are making in that old clubhouse right now?"

And they did sing. It goes to show what bum singers Shadow and I really are. You would never miss us in that bunch. How sweetly that "Maytime" song came to us from the partly opened windows of the clubhouse. And now Perry Stokes was singing that solo part:

"Spring, she is a maiden, waiting to be wooed,
Hiding blossoms laden in her solitude.
Coy she is, and meeker than the summer fair,
But for those who seek her. . . ."

"Now watch!" exclaimed Shadow.

The door of the clubhouse had opened. A figure slipped silently out, and this time we were close enough to recognize him.

It was Roy Dobel!

Right was Shadow. Right he was when he figured in the beginning that it was Roy Dobel who had something to do with the ghost on the cliff. But wrong was he when he thought he knew just what Roy's business with that ghost was. Roy was not working with the ghost. Nor was he working against it.

Roy closed the door silently behind him. He ran to the place where he had left his saddle. He picked up the burden and slung it across his shoulder. Then he went to the other tree and picked up the gun.

"Follow now," came Shadow's steady voice, as Roy began his way toward the cliff path. But Shadow didn't have to tell me. I was right at his heels. We did not stop once, nor did we speak a word. We kept our eyes on the dark shape of Roy Dobel going toward the cliff path. He never looked back but once, and that

was at the foot of the cliff path, where he paused and struck a match. He turned as he held the flame, then he stooped and picked up a lantern, which he lit and swung on up the cliff path. I started to follow him, but Shadow gripped my arm.

"Wait," said Shadow to me in a whisper. "Let's watch him from here. He can't get away from us now. We can see his lantern light."

"You don't mean to tell me you're afraid to follow him farther?" I asked.

"Not quite," said Shadow, "but look below."

I looked toward the river, where he pointed. Flatboats were landing on the muddy shore. We were not the only ones watching to-night. All the boys in the Pelham gang had been keeping an eye on our cliff path, and now they had landed in their flatboats on our shore and were coming up.

Together we watched the tiny light that climbed higher and higher—the lantern carried by Roy Dobel as he climbed to Cliff Cave. But he never reached Cliff Cave. No. He didn't even get within a hundred feet of it before there came such an unearthly cry—oh, boy! I can hear it yet! And the next instant the mouth of Cliff Cave was lighted up with a greenish light, and there came out of that cave the ghost—the ghost of a horse and rider, white draperies trailing behind it.

"Roy!" I yelled. "For heaven's sake! Roy! Come back! Come back!"

I wasn't the only one shouting it. Every boy—Shadow and the Pelhams—everybody was shouting for Roy to turn and run before the awful specter that came thundering down upon him. But Roy didn't seem to hear us. Roy dropped upon one knee. He raised his gun to his shoulder and took careful aim at the oncoming

specter of the greenish-white horse and rider—and he fired.

I *know* he fired. By Jinks! I heard the shot. And I saw for a moment the curl of smoke as it leaped away from his gun. But it had no effect on the ghost. No. That horse and rider came on—after the shot was fired—it came on.

There was a shriek!

I flung myself down upon the ground and rolled out of the way. The other boys must have done the same. Because I lay flat until I heard the thundering hoofs pass by me and die out upon the path below. Then I raised my head. As I did so, I saw Shadow Loomis sitting up across from me. And the Pelham fellows, they had scooted down the cliff side when they had seen the ghost coming. They now stood looking up at us as if they were surprised to see us still alive.

"The light!" yelled Briggen. "The light!"

I turned my eyes upward. The little light of the lantern was coming slowly down the cliff. We sat there, too stunned to move. In a little while the light neared us. I looked up into Roy Dobel's face as he held the lantern up.

"Hawkins!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, Roy," I said, "we followed you here, Shadow and I. We thought you were the one who played the ghost on this cliff—"

"Of all things!" exclaimed Roy. "Well, now you know, anyway."

"Now we know," I said. "The ghost is a real ghost."

"It is for a fact," whispered Roy. "I shot at it to-night and my aim was true. If it was anything but a ghost I would have brought it down. But Hawkins, you can't kill a ghost. I shot at it. I know."

"I saw you shoot," I said, "but wait. Let's go back to the clubhouse and talk it over there."

We walked our weary way back down the cliff path and, strange to say, we found no trace of the ghostly horse and rider that had gone down this same path a few minutes before. The Pelham fellows, however, got cold feet and went back to their flatboats.

We paused when we reached that spot where Shadow and I had been watching all night.

"Now, Roy," I said, "give me those saddlebags you have."

Willingly he gave them to me. I thrust my hand into the pocket of one. I pulled out a handful of shells.

"Look here, Roy," I said. "Did you put these in here?"

He gave a look, then shook his head.

"No," he said, "these are blanks. What I put in were real bullets. I meant to get that ghost to-night. That's why I took the gun."

"Well," I said, "whoever you're shootin' at knows what you intend to do. Somebody came in the early part of the evening and dumped out these bags. Let's look."

We looked. And we found, at the spot where Shadow and I had seen a dark shadow upset the bags of Roy Dobel—there we found the real bullets.

"He dumped the bullets out on the ground here," I said, "and he filled your bags with blanks, like the one you shot at the ghost on the cliff. What does that tell you, Roy?"

"Enough," said Roy. "The ghost is onto me, but I think I owe you fellas an explanation. You think I've been doing something against the club—"

"No thinking about it," I said; "we know it."

"But I've got my reasons," said Roy.

"So's everybody," I said. "No matter what you do, there is a reason for it."

"I'll own up," said Roy. "I've been trying to find that Cave of Wonders you fellas told about. I kind o' figured it would be on my pop's land. If it is, of course my pop wouldn't have to work any more. It wasn't for myself. I don't care, 'cause I'm young and everything. But my pop—he's gettin' old. If that Wonder Cave was on his land, why, he could take it easy the rest o' his life, and so I said to myself I'd try to get into Cliff Cave and find the entrance to the Wonder Cave, and maybe I could prove it was on my pop's farm."

"Look here, Roy," I said, "you can thank your stars you're alive. You had no business going after this thing all by yourself—see? You need us boys, and we need you, and none of us can play single in any game. From now on every boy in our club is going to look for this Cave of Wonders, and we are going to try to steer clear of this spooky ghost business while we do it. And in the end we will give up the cave to the one it belongs to."

Which we did.

XXV

Good News

FOR one hour after the meeting was over to-day I sat alone with Doc Waters and Jeckerson in my little writing room, telling them all I knew about the ghost on the cliff.

"This Cave of Wonders," I said, ending up my talk, "would make Judge Granbery's eyes grow big as saucers. It's a wonderful place indeed. Say, you never saw a cave like it. People would give anything just to take a look at it. It's full of diamonds and rubies and emeralds and blue stones and yellow stones and all colors of the rainbow."

Doc Waters looked seriously at me and his eyes were big, because Doc believes everything I say. But Jeckerson was smiling.

"But you can't find back the Cave of Wonders?" he asked.

"No," I admitted. "When we first went into it there was a big spider web made out of rope up against the cliff side. In the center of that spider web was the hole, which was the entrance to the Cave of Wonders."

"I cannot see," said Jeckerson, "why you couldn't remember where the entrance to that cave was, even though the giant cobweb had been removed."

"There's a lot of things you'll never be able to see," I said. "But when I followed the Spider into his big spider web I didn't take a good look. Neither would you or anybody else if you had been so excited. You told me you would give me twenty dollars reward for

that Spider boy, and I wanted to get that reward. We need it for new baseball uniforms for our club, and I was so excited—"

"I'll raise it now," broke in Jeckerson. "Get me the Spider, and I'll say you're the finest bunch of boys I've ever run up against. I want that little half-Chinese boy. He can give me a lot of valuable information that will end my present troubles. It is the Spider boy who knows where Mui Fong is hiding. And if I don't get Mui Fong pretty soon—well, the big chief in Watertown told me a few days ago that my job depended upon whether or not I got that Chinaman. It's up to me. You see how it is. You catch that Spider kid for me, and I'll raise the reward. By Jove! Doc, I'll give fifty dollars to anybody who can turn over to me that slippery boy who is called the Spider—"

"Fifty dollars!" I exclaimed. "You heard him, Doc. Now you make him stick to his promise, and we'll get the Spider—"

"I know Jeckerson," said Doc softly. "He will live up to anything he says—"

"And you will catch the Spider?" broke in Jeckerson, turning to me. "Hawkins, you can do it if you make up your mind—"

"My mind is already made up," I cut him short. "Fifty dollars! Wow! You shall have the Spider, with his beautiful big cobweb and the wonder cavern behind it."

Lots of fellows make the same kind of promises when they are excited. Fifty dollars! Oh, gee! Who wouldn't be excited!

. . . . . .

Left alone to my own reflections, it came to my mind that perhaps I had talked too much. Jeckerson

and Doc had gone away with my promise to turn over the Spider boy and his giant web and the wonderful cavern beyond it.

Gracious sakes alive! How in the world could I have been so foolish as to tell them that? No matter. I had promised, and I would stick to it.

I went to the door and called: "Perry! O Perry!"

In three minutes Perry Stokes was at the door.

"I was playing first base, sir," he said. "Bill Darby says as how I am going to be a great help to our team this season, sir. It makes me feel kind-a proud. Never before would he consider—"

"We've got to consider this, Perry," I broke in: "that I've promised Detective Jeckerson that you and I would find the Spider boy and his cave and turn him over—"

"Not me!" interrupted Perry, his mouth wide open.

"You and I together," I said with a grin. "I did the promising. Your part is to tell me how we are going to get on the Spider's trail."

Perry looked stupidly at me.

"Come on," I said with a laugh. "Perry, we've just got to help Jeckerson, you see, if we want to keep this clubhouse. Now you know I do—I want to keep this clubhouse, because I like all the boys that come here. How about you?"

Perry didn't answer me, for at that moment there came a rapping at the door.

"Go see who it is," I told him, and Perry threw open the door.

On the porch stood two boys—Jerome, the leader of the Happy Days Club from Watertown, and his chum, Kendricks.

"Sorry to disturb you, Hawkins," said Jerome with

a smile, "but I just came to tell you not to worry any more about us—"

"You mean about the Chinese coin you came to show me last week?" I asked.

"Yes, it looked for a while as if it would get us in trouble," answered Jerome, "but to-day we got proof that we don't have to worry about it any more—"

Jerome turned to his pal, Kendricks, who reached into his pocket and handed him a soiled bit of paper. Jerome passed it to me. I spread it out flat in my hand and read:

"*Chop Lee sorry make boys scare. Hope no more will think bad about Chop Lee. Please to tell honorable father let Chop Lee do laundry again. Boys will not think more about coin—Chop Lee make mistake this time all same good thinking what to do, and so you keep coin. It is no want. Chop Lee do more better laundry for good boy's honorable father. Look—see.*"

"Ha!" I laughed. "So the old Chinaman wants to keep your daddy's business, anyhow?"

"It was Harry Wills," said Jerome, "another member of our club, who got the coin first, you see, and he brought it to me when he got that other note from Chop Lee warning him to send the coin back. But what's the use of talking about it now? After coming down to see you that day, we felt pretty much worried, and we decided to give Chop Lee the coin back. Then when we arrived home we discovered that we had lost the coin—"

"I saw the Spider take it out of your pocket," I told him. "But I didn't have a chance to tell you about it, because if I had I wouldn't have been able to follow the Spider boy who got the coin away from you."

"Well, we worried a great deal at not having the coin to take back," spoke up Kendricks, "and you can imagine how relieved we felt to-day when Harry Wills came in and said he got this note from Chop Lee, telling us in it that he didn't want the coin."

"I'm glad you came and told me all about this," I said. "You boys are out of it now. You have nothing more to worry about. I only wish it was the same with us."

"If we can help you, Hawkins," began Jerome, but I shook my head.

"Nobody can help us now," I said, "except ourselves. We've got the real coin. I knew it all the time. I have the real Chinese coin in my pocket right now—"

Kendricks laid his hand upon my arm.

"Get rid of it!" he said almost in a whisper. "It is bad luck. You'll get hurt—"

I shook my head slowly as I smiled up at Kendrick's honest face.

"Can't get rid of it, and won't get hurt," I said, "and it isn't bad luck. Boys, as sure as I'm standing here before you now, some day I am going to make this jinx coin bring good luck to me—"

I reached into my pocket, drew out the old Chinese coin, and flipped it into the air, catching it as it came down. The two boys from the Happy Days clubhouse backed away from me.

"Well, good-by," said Jerome, keeping his eyes on the hand in which I held the Chinese coin. "Good-by."

He seemed to be fascinated by that Chinese coin. He backed away toward the door and pulled Kendricks with him. They backed out of the door and slammed it shut. I turned to look at Perry with a grin on my face.

But Perry had the same kind of a look on his face that both Jerome and Kendricks had.

"What!" I exclaimed. "You surely do not feel as they do about this Chinese money!"

"I do, sir," said Perry in a low voice. "I am afraid of it. I do wish you would throw that coin in the river, sir." He shifted from one foot to the other. I knew it was only the talk between the Happy Days boys and myself that caused him this nervousness. But he paused at the window and looked out. The next second he had turned toward me.

"Look, Hawkins!" he exclaimed excitedly. "Somebody has come out of the evergreens and is following those two boys—"

With a leap I was beside him at the window. I saw the two Happy Days boys stepping into their motorboat, which was chained to our landing. And on the path, hugging the evergreens, was an odd shape, but even in the fading twilight I could recognize that figure.

I recognized it by one thing—the first thing by which I would recognize the Spider boy—a long stick held in his left hand, and on the tip of the stick a shining blade, upon which the sunset glistened.

"Come on, Perry!" I exclaimed under my breath. "Buckle on your courage and follow me."

"But Hawkins!" cried Perry, clutching my sleeve as I started away. He tugged so hard that I had to wait until he finished speaking. "It's dangerous, sir. It's the Spider with his long spear—it's the Spider, sir."

"Righto!" I cried, laughing, jerking away from Perry at the same time. "Our job, Perry. Yours and mine together, as I told you. Come and chase him with me, or stay here if you like. I'm going to try my hand this

once. Fifty dollars reward if we get him—fifty dollars, Perry."

I swung the door wide and leaped down the porch steps in one. I didn't wait to see whether Perry came or stayed. But I could tell by the sound of footsteps that Perry was right behind me.

The rattle in the Happy Days boat told me that Jerome and Kendricks had got away safely from the Spider. Even before I looked for him, I knew that, no matter why he had followed those two boys, he had failed in his purpose. And I saw him standing on the landing, holding in his left hand the long spearlike staff that rested on the dock, watching the motorboat that was disappearing swiftly around the bend to the north.

He didn't hear us come up. I am sure of that. If the Spider had heard our footsteps he certainly would not have stood so long upon that little landing.

I was only five feet from him when he turned. I can remember the steely glitter of his slanting eyes as he wheeled around and brought down the knife-pointed stick.

"Stand off!" he cried.

His blade was at my chest. Lucky thing for me I can stop sudden in my running. I had stopped just sudden enough. The point of his long-handled knife ripped a button off my jacket.

"Get around him, Perry!" I yelled. At the same time I reached out and struck down the blade that threatened to cut my chest.

But Perry didn't get a chance to run behind him. With a swift motion the Spider leaped aside. The next instant he was running down along the river bank.

"After him, Perry!" I yelled. "Go on! No matter what! Get him!"

Perry went after him like a shot, but the Spider

kept his distance. Up over the cliff path, on to the top of the cliff, and then straight across. Oh, boy! I was all out of breath when I reached that cliff top, and there I had to slow up for a while. I watched the racing figures. Perry was going like the wind and was gradually catching up with the Spider. I chuckled to myself. The Spider was running straight across the cliff top. He would have to stop soon, because the other side of the cliff was near, and he could not go over that. It was a steep wall with a straight side two hundred feet down.

But there is where I was given a surprise. I saw the Spider reach the edge of the cliff, and then he seemed to disappear.

"By Jinks!" I said to myself. "He cannot have jumped over!"

No, of course not. He would have broken his neck. No living thing could go over the side of that cliff and live to tell the tale. I started running again. I saw Perry pause at the edge of the cliff top. He ran this way and that, looking down over the cliff side.

"What did he do, Perry?" I called as I hurried up.

Perry motioned for me to come closer. He was lying on his stomach now, looking down over the cliff's edge. I dropped on hands and knees and crawled to the edge and looked down.

"The spider web!" I exclaimed. "By Jinks! Perry, the giant spider web!"

There it was, just as Shadow and I had seen it the time before. Nothing fairy tale about it now. There it was, flattened out against the hillside for all the world like a giant cobweb—only we knew it wasn't made by spider's weaving. No. It was made of thick, strong rope, old steamboat cable, stolen from the wharf, most likely.

And the strangest thing was the Spider boy going down the ropes of his giant web. He looked up once at us and laughed. The next instant he had reached the center of the huge web and disappeared in a hole in the cliff side.

"Get up, Perry!" I said quickly as I rose to my feet. "Have you got anything to make a mark with?"

"This," said Perry, tapping the little hand ax that was fastened to his belt.

"Good," I said. "Now listen. As we go back you chip a piece out of every tree to mark our way so we can find this place back. This time we won't lose the way to this place, even if the giant spider web does disappear again. I'll know next time where that hole in the cliff side is. Come on, Perry, get busy and start marking the trees as we go, and we'll tell the other fellas that, as usual, we finished what we started out to do."

"But," said Perry, "we started out to catch the Spider, but we didn't do it."

"No," I said, "but we found back the entrance to the Cave of Wonders."

Which we did.

XXVI

The Giant Spider Web

THE next day we told all the boys of our discovery. They wanted to go at once and see for themselves. As soon as the meeting ended we lined up and started. As Perry Stokes had blazed the trail, we let him lead the way.

Shadow Loomis felt a bit peeved because he had not been with me when I discovered anew the place where the Spider boy entered the Cave of Wonders.

"Just one question," he said. "Let's not fool ourselves twice in the same way. We thought once before that we could find back this wonderful cave, but you remember that somehow or other we could not locate the entrance, because the spider web had been removed. What makes you believe now that you can find it? Suppose the big spider web has disappeared again?"

"I have taken care of that," I said as I stood up. "When Perry and I started back, we chipped a piece out of each tree we passed. The last chip is in the old sycamore, where we boys used to meet before we had this clubhouse. We can start there and follow the trees that have chips in the bark."

"Hawkins," said Roy Dobel, as he moved up close to me, "if the Cave of Wonders is on my pop's farm—"

"If it is," I broke in, "your dad gets it, Roy. But all I can say is that I hope it ain't."

"It ain't right for a fella to say that," said Roy. "We are all members of our club. We ought to be anxious to see that our club gets along and everybody gets what's his."

"I am anxious to see that our club gets along," I said; "that's all. And if we can get this Cave of Wonders and give it to old Judge Granbery, our club will get along. Nobody but Judge Granbery can bust up our club, Roy."

And it wasn't long until we stood once more atop the cliff, against whose side we had seen the giant cobweb when we had chased the Spider boy.

We all looked over the edge.

The giant cobweb was not there. Nothing was there but the steep side of the cliff, falling two hundred feet into the ravine below.

"Ha!" laughed Jerry Moore. "Haven't we had a nice walk? Well, anyway, it's healthy to take a hike like this once in a while, Doc Waters said."

"Well, Hawkins?" demanded our captain.

"I have nothing to say," I told him. I pointed to the last tree on which could be seen the mark made by Perry's hand ax. "There is the end of the trail. Below on the face of this cliff somewhere is the opening into the Cave of Wonders. If the giant cobweb hung where we had last seen it we would have no trouble climbing down its ropes to the center of the web. There you would find the hole which would lead to the Cave of Wonders."

"Ho-hum!" said Jerry Moore. "I feel like walking some more. Let's go back."

"Might as well," agreed Dick. "Fat chance we have to get down the side of that steep cliff."

And we went back.

. . . . . .

Roy Dobel, Shadow Loomis, Perry Stokes, and I gathered together in a little spot close to the old sycamore tree after school the next day.

"The reason I have called this secret meeting of

four," explained Shadow Loomis, "is because I believe we are the only fellas in our club who really have any serious ideas about this Cave of Wonders."

"I'm sure I have," said Roy Dobel. "If it's on my pop's farm, believe me, I want to put in a claim for it."

"And all of us would want you to have it," said Shadow slowly, "provided it is on your daddy's farm, Roy. But I'm anxious to solve the secret of this mysterious spider web if for no other reason than that it interests me. Somehow or other I can't figure out how it can disappear and appear again at different times."

"It is a mystery, sir," said Perry Stokes, nodding. "Most likely Hawkins will be the one to figure out the mystery, sir. He always does."

Shadow smiled.

"That's why I invited you to this meeting of four, Perry," he said pleasantly, "because you think Hawkins is a wonder-worker, and anybody who thinks like that is a help to the person he thinks so well of."

"Perry is a great help to me," I chimed in with a grin. "Believe me, Shadow, when it comes to telling what Perry is, I think I'd have to say he is my right hand in the hard jobs."

Shadow laughed.

"I know it," he said. "Perry is a true-blue scout. And Hawkins, as you other boys know, is wound up in this spider web. He just can't escape it because it has him tied hand and foot. It means to him the grip of the old Chinaman, Mui Fong."

"Mui Fong!" whispered Perry Stokes, and his face had a terrified look. "Let us hope not."

"We all hope not," said Shadow, laughing, but the laughter was only a blind. Shadow, too, felt that there was more truth in what he said than any of us really

admitted. "Yet," he continued, "unless we tear down this giant cobweb from the cliff side, our clubhouse is bound to be torn down in its stead in the end. That's why I sent for you. The other boys know nothing about this secret meeting I have called here to-day at this old sycamore tree."

"We had better start," said Roy Dobel. He lifted the gun that lay beside him and started up the path toward the cliff, but Shadow called him back.

"We can do no good in that direction," he said, pointing to the place where Perry and I had marked the trees with a blazed trail. "See here, I have brought this." He pulled out from under his coat a little tube. Taking each end, he pulled and showed that it was a spyglass that could be lengthened out three feet. "With this," he said, "we shall watch that spot where we have seen the Spider enter his den—"

Roy Dobel grew excited.

"Look here," he said, drawing something from his pocket. "I have invented this. It is a splotcher."

"A splotcher?" we all said together in surprise.

"That's what," said Roy. "I been thinking over a lot of things, and I figured out that this is what we need. I'm a good shot with this gun, as you fellas know," and he patted the gun he held. "You find the spot where you saw the Spider kid go into the cliff, and if there ain't a hole there, I'll aim at it and splotch it with my splotcher, and there will be a splotch upon the cliff side, where you can climb to find back the hole—"

"You think that the hole is closed, then, after the Spider enters—" began Shadow.

"I'm not thinkin' about it," said Roy. "I know it."

We all looked at the little ramrod with its peculiar bulb on the end. It was really a steel rod of about six

to eight inches, and at the tip was a little glass bulb filled with a red liquid.

"Wherever this thing hits," said Roy, in explanation, "it will leave a red mark that won't ever come off till the end of the world—"

"How'll you be sure you can fire it in the gun?" I asked.

"Oh," said Roy, "don't you think I've tried it out? Of course I have. Two of my pop's hogs we killed last winter had red marks on 'em clean through to the bacon. It'll hold color, I promise you."

We said no more after that, but we started on our way. It was the most quiet march I ever saw. We went single file. Perry led the way, followed by Shadow, and Roy and I brought up the rear. Our way took us along the bottom of the ravine. Occasionally we looked up at the cliff, but there was nothing to show that we had reached our goal until Perry spoke.

"It's a spruce," he said, pointing up with his left hand. "And there it is. I'll never forget it, Hawkins. The last tree marked. There it is."

I looked up to the left. Above the cliff grew the towering spruce. Somewhere below, on the face of the cliff, was the spot where we had entered the Cave of Wonders.

"Well," I said, "pick out the spot, if you can, and let Roy splotch it." And I laughed.

But the laugh died on my lips. And nobody said a word. But all of us had our eyes glued on the cliff. And there above it on the very edge appeared a figure, seemingly in a hurry. It ran along the edge of the cliff top.

"Look!" cried Shadow Loomis. "Look, Hawkins! It is the Spider!"

He needn't have told me who it was. I knew. By Jinks! I knew it by the long stick he carried, the stick with the knifeblade at the tip.

"Give me the spyglass!" I cried, and Shadow handed it over. I drew out the sections and, putting it to my eye, I focused it on the tiny figure above us on the cliff edge. Now I saw him running to a certain stump. He was as big as life in the spyglass. I could even see the half smile on his yellow face, the glitter in his slanting eyes as he stooped. He stooped to a certain tree stump. What was that he was reaching for? A bundle of cords—a bundle of cords!

"Look sharp!" I called to Shadow. "Watch him!"

I watched him closely through the glass. He had grasped the bundle of cords and was pulling them—pulling away from the cliff edge. And suddenly as if by magic there began to grow on the face of the cliff a giant spider web. It spread out from a central point. By Jinks! That *was* clever! The bundle of cords that he was pulling brought out the ropes from a central spot. They radiated in a large circle upon the face of the cliff and suddenly came to a stop.

"Hurry!" I yelled. "Roy!"

But Roy didn't seem to hear me. Nor did Shadow or Perry. They had their eyes fixed on the strange sight on the cliff side. The Spider boy was going down the ropes of the giant spider web.

"Shoot, Roy!" I yelled.

"But I can't hit the boy!" yelled Roy, his eyes still fixed on the tiny figure that was climbing down the ropes of the giant spider web. In a few seconds the Spider boy had reached the center of the great web. He disappeared. He shoved gently on the spot and the cliff seemed to make an opening for him. He disap-

THE SPIDER BOY WAS GOING DOWN THE ROPES OF THE GIANT SPIDER-WEB

peared inside, and once again the hole closed. The ropes that formed the spider web began to contract to the center.

"Shoot!" I cried. "Roy, if you want to save that spot, shoot that splotcher."

Roy raised his gun and took aim. I thought he was too late. But when the smoke of his shot cleared away, I saw a red blotch upon the side of the cliff.

"There," he said, "is the entrance to the Cave of Wonders."

"Fine!" I said, but my voice was shaking. "Come on, boys, let's get out of this place. I feel as if this were a haunted spot. Let's go back and tell the other boys that we have settled this mystery once and for all, and that whoever is entitled to the Cave of Wonders we will give it to 'em."

Which we did.

XXVII

In the Cave of Wonders

SHADOW LOOMIS sat with me in my writing room while I wrote the minutes.

"Well, Shadow," I said, "everything seems to be turning out all right. Pretty soon we will have peace and quiet on this old river bank. And besides, we've got the Cave of Wonders."

"You've got it, all right," broke in Shadow. "But I'm not so sure that you'll keep it."

"You know something!" I snapped. "Why didn't you tell me?"

"Didn't get a chance," answered Shadow with a grin. "Our secret has been discovered. I saw some boys hanging around the cliff to-day before meeting. I got here early, and I took a walk and sort o' scouted around. I wanted to see whether or not the red blotch of paint that Roy shot up against the cliff side was still there. I just figured that maybe the Spider boy had noticed the mark, or perhaps the Chinaman. They have mysterious ways of doing things, and I just wanted to see whether or not they had removed the spot."

"Well," I asked, "did you see the mark still there?"

"Yes, and I saw other things," said Shadow, leaning forward across the desk. "Three boys were standing just about where we stood when we shot the red paint up against the cliff side. I couldn't tell who they were from where I stood, and I hadn't time to look close, for they started my way, and I hid behind the bushes until they went past."

"So you didn't see them any more?"

"Oh, yes I did. I went back to my place on the path and gazed up at the red blotch on the rocks, and I was wondering how we would ever get up to that opening, when suddenly I saw them above on the edge of the cliff, and this time I knew them—by Jove! Hawkins, who do you think?"

"Pelham fellas," I said, guessing right off the bat.

"You're wrong," said Shadow. "It was Stanley Malapo and his brother Guy, and with them was our old friend, Little Sam."

"You don't mean," I said, "that our old friends Stan and Little Sam are trying to double-cross us?"

"I don't know. When I saw them there on the edge of the cliff they were letting down a rope ladder. They had iron hooks on the end of it, and they fastened the hooks on the edge of the cliff. Then they let down the rope ladder, but it didn't reach to the red mark on the cliff side, so they pulled it up and went away—I guess to get a longer ladder."

"Well," I said, as I got up and reached for my coat, "we will beat them to it. Come on. I'm going into the Cave of Wonders and put my name in it and claim it before they get back with a ladder long enough. And what's more, I'm not going to need any rope ladder to get into it, either. Are you comin' with me?"

"I am," cried Shadow, clapping his hat upon his head, "if it's only to see how you'll get into it without a rope ladder."

"You'll see that, all right," I promised him, as I swung my arms into my coat, and, not waiting to grab my cap, I flew out of the clubhouse. Shadow was right at my heels.

. . . . . .

We pulled up, all out of breath, on the edge of the cliff. I threw myself down in the grass to rest. Shadow sat down beside me, but neither of us spoke. After a while Shadow sneaked away on hands and knees, returning in a few seconds.

"Not a soul around," he said.

"All right, then," I said, getting up. "Now sit still and let me show you how it is to be done."

I ran along the cliff top to a certain tree stump, where I had seen the Spider boy once stoop. And around the stump was a thin cord, just barely visible in the high grass around it. I grabbed the string and lifted it clear of the stump. Out of the weeds came a great bundle of cords.

"I've got it, Shadow!" I yelled.

Before Shadow could ask me any questions I began to pull away from the tree stump, and as I moved backward the bundle of cords began to spread and lengthen.

"Look over the cliff!" I yelled to Shadow. "Look over the edge!"

He wriggled forward, while I continued to pull backward. He gave one look down and then turned his head.

"You've got it!" he cried. "It is the giant spider web!"

But I knew. I had watched the Spider boy do this very same thing. I had watched him that day through the spyglass. Now I felt my back up against a tree and I turned. There was a huge iron spike in the tree, and I reached up and fastened the end of the cord to that spike. Then I ran forward again. The cords were spread out in a big fan-shape from the spike in the tree. And at the end of each cord I found an end of rope, and each end of rope came exactly to the root of a tree

growing near it, and in each root was a spike like the one on which I had fastened the cord. I saw, now. The iron ring in the end of each rope fitted the spike. I ran from one rope-end to the next. I fastened each iron ring to each spike in a tree root or trunk.

"Now look!" cried Shadow, as I came forward. I slid down upon my hands and knees and then, lying flat, I crept to the edge of the cliff. The ropes went over the cliff and hung against the cliff side in the shape of a great spider web. The lower ends of the rope were hanging below, weighted with stones.

"Where did the ropes come from, Shadow?" I asked, although I knew what his answer would be. I just wanted to make sure.

"They seemed to come out of that red blotch on the cliff side," he said.

"Come on," I said hurriedly, "we must go down this spider web in a hurry."

I started first, going down as I had seen the Spider boy do, but it was a risky business over the cliff edge. As I hung there for a second I thought surely I must let go in another moment and be dashed down into that rocky ravine two hundred feet below.

"Take it easy, Hawkins," came Shadow's even voice, and then I felt my foot catch in the ropes and I let my weight down upon it. By Jinks! It put new life into me. This was a thrill. It brought back to mind the old circus days—the tight-rope walker far above the heads of the crowd that watched him. How I used to wish I could do that same thing! Well, now I had the chance.

I let myself down one foot. I took a new hold—another foot. I glanced up. Shadow was coming down. He seemed to come so much faster, so I went

more boldly. Then suddenly I saw before my eyes a red blotch against the cliff side. I reached out my hand slowly. It seemed a solid rock in front of me. I timidly touched it with my finger. To my surprise, the red-marked rock swung slowly inward.

A dark hole yawned before me, and, taking a look around, I saw that I was in the center of the huge spider web of rope. I slowly crept forward into that dark opening. Then, when I felt solid ground under me, I moved rapidly on hands and knees for a few paces and waited. Shadow came in presently.

"You've done a wonderful thing, old fella," he sang out. But I motioned him to be silent. His grinning face was the last thing I saw until I gazed down into that wonderful chamber of a thousand glittering jewels. We crawled—I don't know how far—it seemed miles; but when at last we looked down into that Cave of Wonders I forgot everything that had happened before.

"Listen," I whispered. "Hear that sound?"

"What is it?" whispered Shadow.

It was a pitiful sound—that little noise that broke upon the awful stillness of that cavern. For a few seconds we stayed there in silence, gazing down into that glittering chamber, wondering where the light came from that threw the soft, shimmering glow over all those sparkling stones. Without a word I crept forward. A stone slid from under my foot and went rattling down the steep incline ahead of me. My heart was in my mouth as I backed, with both arms outstretched, stopping Shadow in his close walk behind me.

"There it is again!" whispered Shadow over my shoulder.

"Come on," I said boldly, and together we went

forward. Suddenly we stopped. We had come around a corner. And from our new post of vantage we saw a blazing light—a flame that leaped fitfully from a great bronze lamp, throwing grotesque shadows everywhere. It stood like a flaming sentinel at the farther end of the cavern. The great pillars of salty sparklers stood round about it on every side. From the roof hung long, pointed spears that glistened with dripping moisture. From every side there came reflections in every color of the rainbow. Oh, boy! What a sight! This was indeed the Cave of Wonders!

"Be careful!" whispered Shadow over my shoulder. "Be sure that we are alone!"

"Who's there?" I called out. And the loudness of my voice startled me.

But no answer came. We ran, then, down the steep path, into the very room of the Cave of Wonders.

It was the call of that pitiful voice again that stopped us.

"Over there!" said Shadow sharply, and I moved swiftly toward where he pointed. It seemed at first that there was no place to go, but perceiving a sort of stairway cut in the natural rock of the cavern, I went up swiftly and stood at last on a sort of rocky platform. On my left was a dark rectangle. I stepped into that dark patch and threw the ray of my flashlight ahead. Oh, boy!

There he lay. Yes, I knew now. Because, even as I flashed the light, there came again the low, piteous sound, and I saw a figure chained—yes, chained to an iron socket in the wall of the cavern.

"Good night!" I exclaimed. "Who can it be?"

"Hawkins!" came the pitiful voice. "Is it Seckatary Hawkins? I know your voice—"

In a moment I was kneeling beside him. My flashlight found his face, and I saw!

"John!" I exclaimed under my breath. "As I live! John Malapo!"

"Oh!" came from John, as he rolled from side to side. "I am John Malapo. Help me, Hawkins, help me."

"That I will!" I said quickly. "Here, Shadow, hold this light."

Shadow took the light as I bent over and looked at the chains that bound poor old good-for-nothing John Malapo. But alas! what to do when iron chains bound iron bands that bound human ankles and wrists.

"Johnny!" I cried in his ear, because I had heard other sounds in the cavern beyond us. "Johnny, tell me everything that you can—everything that might help me to help you—"

"I can't," he said, "I don't know. Mui Fong put me here—the old Chinaman—I can't explain now. You'd better get out before he comes—don't let him catch you here. You can come back for me sometime, but go now, Hawkins, befre it's too late."

"Steady, boy," I whispered, patting him on the shoulder. "Sit still, and trust me to get you out of this. Somebody's coming, and I must go now, but I'll come back."

Both Shadow and I sprang to our feet. Sounds of voices below in the cavern had come to our ears. Cautiously we peered out. Below in the sparkling Cave of Wonders three figures were moving about in the light that came from the big brazen lamp.

"I told you it was all a fake," came the loud voice of a boy. But I didn't have to be told whose voice it was. I knew, because I had heard the voice before. It

was the voice of Guy Malapo. He was standing in the center of the cavern below us. And on either side of him stood a boy—on his left Little Sam Burnham, and on his right his brother, Stan Malapo.

"It's not a fake, Guy," came Stan's soft voice. "John's here."

"Aw, I won't stand for any more," said Guy. "If he's here we would find him. I'll not risk my life coming into these underground places any more."

"I don't think you want to find him," said Little Sam Burnham, looking up squarely into Guy Malapo's eyes. "If you really want to help your brother, help us find where that big Chinaman's got him hidden.

"Prove to me that he's got him hidden," said Guy. "Not that I care a rap for John. He ain't nothin' to me, even if he is my brother. I'm doin' this only for Stan—for what Stan has done for me—to pay Stan back, you see."

"Now you look here, you big piece of cheese!" cried Little Sam, and as he stood there facing big Guy Malapo I had to think of David and Goliath. "You listen to me, you poor simp! I resigned from a good club of boys to help you out. And now you got the nerve to stand here and argufy with Stanley about something you don't know nothin' about, and you ought to be ashamed o' yourself, Guy Malapo. You great big yella-hearted good-for-nothin' bum you! Dern if I ain't sorry I promised Stan I'd help you, you big cheese."

Before there was time for an answer there came that piteous call from the off-cave where John Malapo lay bound in chains.

"Listen!" exclaimed Stanley Malapo.

Before they could move I had stepped out of my hiding place.

"Down!" I yelled in a loud voice. "Get down, every one of you! How dare you come into this cave?"

Guy Malapo uttered a cry of terror and went down on his knees. Stan and Little Sam turned startled faces up at me. I laughed.

"Get up, Guy Malapo," I said. "Boys, this cave has already been taken in my name. I hope you don't expect to claim it."

"I claim it!" shouted Guy Malapo, leaping to his feet.

"You're out of order," I said with a grin. "You don't amount to a row of beans, Guy. Look here, Stanley. You're the boss of your crowd. Shadow and I'll not listen to any other. What business brings you here?"

"We didn't expect to find you here, Hawkins," said Stanley.

"I didn't think you did," I said, "but you better talk fast, because any minute that old Chinaman might be back, and you know what we can expect then."

"We came for John," called out Stanley in a loud voice. "The old Chinaman's been using John. And John double-crossed the Chinaman to help Guy, here—"

"I know," I said. "John Malapo brought me the Chinese coin when he thought his brother Guy needed it to save himself—"

"He did not!" broke in Guy Malapo.

But I waved my hand and bowed my head.

"As you like," I said. "Your brother John is here, chained to the wall. And why? Because he stole the Chinese coin to bring to me, when he knew that you were to get a whipping if you didn't have it."

"That can't be true?" cried Guy Malapo, and he sprang up toward where I stood.

There came another low moan from the dark corner. Guy ran into the little dark cell where his brother John lay bound in chains. "Is 'at you, John?" he called softly.

Only a low moan. The next second both Stanley and Little Sam were up beside me.

"Hawkins," cried Stanley, "can't you get John out of here?"

"I'll get John out!" I told him, and I shoved aside everybody and walked into the little space where John Malapo lay bound. "Shadow!" I called, and Shadow came. "Have you brought with you a file?"

"I always carry a small one," he said, "if it will do any good, Hawkins."

It would do me some good I assured him. But it was a slow process. Such a small file and such thick chains.

"Here," said a voice beside me, "let me do that filing for you."

I turned, and as I did so the flashlight in my left hand lit up the face of Guy Malapo.

He grasped the file and began. It seemed no time until he had his brother loose. Together we raised him between us. "Can you walk, John?" asked Guy in a low voice.

"I'll try," said John.

Together we led him down into the great open space —the great floor of that Cave of Wonders.

Stanley Malapo's eyes grew wide in wonder as he saw me and his brother Guy supporting the limp figure of his brother John. We paused in the center of that wonder cave.

"How do you feel, John?" asked Guy in a kindly voice.

IN THE SPARKLING CAVE OF WONDERS THREE FIGURES WERE MOVING ABOUT

Stan Malapo gave a glad cry.

"Guy!" he cried. "You do feel sorry for John!"

"Sorry!" echoed Guy. "Brother, if he went through half that I did I would feel sorry. But he has gone through more. Come on, Stan, let's get him home. Pop will be glad to see him. I would never have believed that John was working for old Mui Fong, as I was. Who could have known it?"

And so I gave up my job. Stanley took hold of my end of John Malapo. And the last we saw of 'em they were taking him out into the open air, Guy on one side and Stanley on the other, and John Malapo was never to be a prisoner in the cave of Mui Fong again.

"Well," I said to Little Sam, as he and Shadow and I stood together on the crystal floor of the Cave of Wonders, "you little scamp, you! Our club wasn't good enough for you, was it?"

"Oh, please!" he said in a whining voice. "Didn't you know I had to help my old friends first? They needed me more than you. But now I'm ready to join the club again. I'll be glad to come back if you'll take me back."

Which we did.

XXVIII

The Capture of Mui Fong

TO-DAY, as I came down the river path, I saw all the boys standing in a little group in front of the clubhouse, talking earnestly together, and I could see something was up.

"What's the trouble?" I asked.

"Don't tell him," spoke up Jerry Moore. "Let him see for himself. Come along, Seck."

They led me down to the river bank and along to where the high cliffs rise up from the bank. A white horse lay dead on the rocky shore right under the cliffs.

"Ah!" I said. "Poor old thing!" And I walked closer and took a good look. It was a beautiful horse, and I felt sorry to think that it was dead.

"Well," said Shadow Loomis, walking up to my side, "this ends the ghost on the cliff."

"Do you really think," I asked, "that this was the white horse we saw?"

"No thinking about it," said Shadow. "Notice the fancy trappings on that horse, Hawkins. What's got me guessing is how he fell off the cliff and broke his neck. And what became of the rider that we always saw on his back?"

"Search me," I said, "but I guess you're right. Wonder how it happened?"

There came a call from the clubhouse. It was Doc Waters' voice. I hurried back to the cluhouse and saw Doc Waters sitting on the steps, and beside him was Jeckerson, the detective from Watertown. I told them about seeing the dead white horse.

"Too bad," spoke up Jeckerson. "I never thought the horse might leap off the cliff. I should have thought of that before I sprang my ghost trap."

"What!" I exclaimed, "Do you mean to say that you killed that horse, Jeckerson?"

"Not quite that," he said hastily, "but old Judge Granbery wanted me to find out what that ghost was, and so I took a half dozen of my men last night and laid for it."

"Oh!" I cried. "I wish you could have saved that beautiful white horse. He was a beauty. It's a pity to see him lying there on the rocky shore like that. Why couldn't you have been more thoughtful, Jeckerson? Always I try to tell my pals to be thoughtful, to think first before they do anything. I would think a man like you wouldn't need to be told that."

Jeckerson looked at Doc Waters with a smile. Doc winked his eye.

"Come now, Hawkins," said Doc, cheerily, "you just remember one other thing you always tell your boy chums—use common sense. I think you ought to use some right now. Jeckerson had no chance to save that poor horse. It's lucky we saved the man on its back."

"Who was it?" I demanded quickly. "Mui Fong, the old Chinaman?"

"No," said Jeckerson, shaking his head. "Sit down here with us and I'll tell you the whole thing. Judge Granbery simply gave me orders to investigate the ghost that appeared every night on the cliff. I tried it several nights, but couldn't find out much. And yesterday just about dark I had some of my men bring down in my motorboat a powerful searchlight, which we hid in a snug place near the cliff path. We waited long into the night for that ghost of a horse and rider, and were just

about to give up, when we saw a light on the other side of the river. We were interested in that light then and paid no further attention to the cliff path. We watched that light come slowly across the river. When it neared this side we could see it was a flatboat, and soon there came up the bank about a dozen boys, the leader carrying a lantern."

"They must have been the Pelham fellas," I said.

"They started up the cliff path," continued Jeckerson, "but they had hardly gone ten paces when the Cliff Cave suddenly was flooded with a green light, and with a shriek something in white came flying out and turned down the path toward the boys with the lantern. The boys turned and fled, screaming. I shouted an order to my men. They pointed the searchlight at the cliff path and turned it on. The great white ray of light flashed out upon the path, and then we saw what it was that had come out of Cliff Cave and was racing down the cliff path toward us. It was a beautiful white horse with a white rider. The horse took fright as the bright ray of our searchlight was flashed upon him and came to a halt so suddenly that his rider flew over his head and rolled upon the cliff path. The next instant the horse wheeled around and was flying back up the path, wild with fright. We ran forward and grabbed the white rider before he could get to his feet. Just as we looked up again we saw the horse leap off the cliff. Sorry, all of us, that the beautiful animal was lost. But we had our man. That was the most important thing, after all."

"Who was it?" I asked.

"One of Mui Fong's gang, a Chinaman," answered Doc Waters. "But I had to send him to a hospital. He got a pretty bad crack in his head when the horse threw

him. He was knocked out, so we didn't get to question him."

"But what we came down here for now, Hawkins," said Jeckerson, "is to warn you boys. Have you a singing practice on for to-night?"

"No," I told him. "We practice to-morrow night. Nothing on to-night."

"Good," said Jeckerson. "Now look here, Hawkins, I'm going to need you to-night."

"Why me?" I asked. "What in the world could I do?"

"To lead me to the entrance to that Cave of Wonders where Mui Fong hides," said Jeckerson. "We'll have to get in that way, I guess. There is another entrance, through Cliff Cave, else the white horse and rider would not have come out that way. But not knowing where that entrance is, we will have to get in from the opposite side of the cliff."

"Wait!" I exclaimed. "There's one boy who would know the other entrance—John Malapo. We rescued him from the prison cave, where Mui Fong had him chained. He would be able to tell you—"

"He would," broke in Jeckerson, "if he were to be found. But he's gone. We thought of him and went to his father's place. But the neighbors told us that they had left hurriedly this morning without leaving their new address. They didn't want anybody to know where they went, Hawkins. Old man Malapo was so glad to get his boys back again, and when John and Guy told him what they knew of Mui Fong, I guess the old man was so frightened that he took them all with him to some place where even Mui Fong could not find them again."

"Well!" I exclaimed. "That does surprise me.

But on the other hand, I believe I'm ready to think I'd do the same thing—when Mui Fong found out that John had got out of the place where he was chained—yes, I think the old Chinaman would have hunted him up and given him something worse, just for revenge."

"That old Chinaman will not have a chance to do another wicked thing," said Jeckerson. "To-night I lay my hands on him and turn him over to the police. It's been a long chase and a hard job, but to-night will end it, and I'm mighty glad it's over."

At this moment we saw a man and a boy coming up the path. It was Roy Dobel and his daddy.

"Hawkins," said Roy as he came up, "my father has just come to tell me that the Cave of Wonders is under our farm."

"I'm glad to hear it, Roy," I said. "I hope it is true."

"It is," said Mr. Dobel with a grin. "There are several holes on my place, as you know, where the place is rocky. I entered them all this week. After what Roy has told me I've been just a bit curious to see this wonderful cave he talks about, and to-day I entered the last hole on my property. Imagine my surprise when I came into a beautiful cavern. I knew it was the one you've been talking about, because it was lit up by big brass torches—"

"Yes," I admitted, "you have found the Cave of Wonders, all right."

"It certainly is a Cave of Wonders," said Mr. Dobel, "but I didn't stay to look. I was a bit afraid, you know. I went on through as fast as I could, and just came out at this end about five minutes ago."

"You mean you came out of the little hole on the opposite side of the cliff?" I said.

"No," said Mr. Dobel, "I just came out a few minutes ago at the mouth of Cliff Cave—"

"By Jinks!" I said. "You've found the opening on this side, then! Jeckerson, he's found it!"

Jeckerson stepped up and offered his hand.

"Mr. Dobel," he said, "I congratulate you, not only because the cave is on your farm, but because you have found the entrance that will help us clear the old Chinaman out of it. You understand, of course, that you are as much interested in that as any of us. So I hope you will not fail to meet us here to-night at this little clubhouse at seven o'clock to lead us to that opening in the Cliff Cave."

"I will be here," said Mr. Dobel, as he wrung Jeckerson's hand.

. . . . . .

Now, as usual, I was the first one to arrive at the clubhouse. It was only a quarter of seven, and I had to wait fifteen minutes before Jeckerson and Doc would arrive, and perhaps a few minutes longer before Roy and his daddy came, because Roy usually was the last one to arrive for meetings, and I just imagined his daddy would be like him.

I had just finished lighting the lamps, and was walking slowly back into my little writing room, when I heard the rusty hinges of the door sing a low tune. The door slammed shut. I pulled aside the curtains that separate my writing room from the meeting room and looked out.

I never shall forget how my heart jumped. I felt a chill run up my back and my hair stood on end. For there, with his back up against the door, his arms folded, face to face with me was my worst enemy, one who had sworn to kill me.

It was Mui Fong! Mui Fong, the Chinaman, dressed in all his finery, as I had seen him dressed in the Cave of Wonders. His flowing black gown, braided with golden dragons, his little round hat, the shoes with upturned toes—it all made him appear unreal, as if it were not a living person, but a character out of some picture book.

"At last we talk alone," he said, slowly. "You thought I would not come. But I am here."

"Yes, I see you are," I stammered, for my heart was pounding against my ribs, and I did not know what to say or do.

"I am glad you like to see me," said Mui Fong, still with that evil grin upon his yellow face. "You see, I do not treat you as you did me. I wait until you are here before I come to see you. I do not sneak in and out again before you come back."

Slowly my courage was returning to me.

"I never wanted to meet you," I said.

"No, I suppose not. You did not want to meet the fate that was waiting for you at the hands of Mui Fong. But that fate has come to meet you, as you see. I was hoping to-night that you would come, for I knew you would be alone. You see I have been watching this place. I found out what nights you all came together. And I watched on the nights when I knew the other boys did not come. I was hoping that one of these nights you would come alone, when the others did not come down here. So to-night I have my wish."

"What do you want with me?" I demanded. "If it is the old Chinese coin you want—"

I started to unlock the drawer of my desk, but he held up his hand. "Don't hurry," he said, smoothly, "we shall have plenty of time, you and I. I sent you

warnings, many. You took your time about them. I shall take my time now, before I send you to be swallowed up by everlasting night."

"You came for something!" I cried. "You want something. What is it?"

His words had chilled the marrow in my bones. I was shaking like a leaf. He glared at me now. The evil grin left his face.

"You have discovered my beautiful cave." His voice now was higher, angrier. "You have killed my beautiful horse that I brought with me from old China land. You have kept my lucky coin. You have done everything to ruin me and have made it unsafe for me here. So now I must go, but first I shall pay you for everything. Before I leave I will be revenged upon you, foolish boy. Foolish to think that you could fight Mui Fong. You did much, but in the end you must perish. You cannot save yourself."

From out of his wide sleeves he drew a little curved sword. There was a silence in the clubhouse, and I looked wildly at the strange figure of the Chinaman as he stood there passing his thumb over the sharp blade of the little sword. The only sounds I could hear were the loud beating of my heart and the ticking of the clock upon my desk. I glanced at the time. It was just three minutes of seven. An idea struck me.

"Listen," I said to Mui Fong. "It was not I who killed the beautiful white horse. I love horses, and I would have given my own life if I could have saved the beauty that went over the cliff."

His eyes softened. Slowly he shook his head.

"If that were true," he said, "I could forgive you. But you lie. One who does the things you have done to me could never tell the truth. Now, before I send

you into the land of everlasting darkness, I will ask you to hand over that Chinese coin."

He held out his hand. "Oh!" I thought to myself, "if I can just keep him a few minutes longer!" I fumbled in my pocket.

"Make haste!" he said, sternly.

"My keys!" I said, slapping my pockets, one after another, "I can't find my keys. Oh, there they are, still in the door where I left them when I unlocked the place."

I heard footsteps on the river path. Perhaps Mui Fong did not, but I was more accustomed to sounds around this old clubhouse. I knew sounds, believe me! and I knew that somebody was coming down the river path. If I could just keep Mui Fong away from me long enough—

"I must pass," I said, as he barred my way. "My keys are in the door. I left them in the lock when I opened up."

"I will get them for you," he said, looking steadily in my eyes. "I do not trust you."

And then he slowly turned. In a flash I had grabbed one of the curtains in the doorway. I tore it down, and with a shout I leaped forward and threw it over Mui Fong's head. The shout I gave only for the purpose of letting somebody know I needed help. And as the heavy curtain wrapped itself around Mui Fong's head, he turned with a smothered cry and struck with the curved sword.

But I leaped aside, and the deadly thing whizzed past my head just by the fraction of an inch.

"Doc!" I cried. "Jeckerson!"

They were bounding up the steps to my aid now. The Chinaman madly tore at the curtain that I had wound about his head. He slipped and fell against

the chairs lined along the table. I saw Jeckerson make one leap from the door. He landed plump upon the fallen Chinaman, and in a moment had both his strong fists around the wrist of the hand which held the little curved sword. Doc Waters sprang to his help, and I ran over, too, and the three of us sat on the Chinaman.

"Take that knife, Doc!" called Jeckerson, and Doc forced back the fingers around the handle. The curved sword fell upon the floor. Jeckerson slipped from his pocket a shiny thing. He snapped it upon the wrists of the Chinaman. It was a pair of handcuffs.

"Now get up!" he commanded. And he and Doc lifted the Chinaman to his feet. Doc took off the curtain, and only then did they see it was Mui Fong.

"Hooray!" yelled Jeckerson. "What a bird to have caught like this, Doc! Our old friend Mui! Glad to see you, to be sure. Hawkins, how did this happen?"

But I shook my head and backed away to a chair, into which I fell and fanned myself with my hand. I was all in. Some other men came in the door. I did not know them, but I knew that Jeckerson had officers planted all around these woods. He turned over to them the prisoner.

"And keep an eagle eye on him, boys," he said. "This bird can escape from anybody and any place."

"And I shall again," spoke up Mui Fong, with a little smile. "Once in my life I did meet a with boy I could never understand."

He looked at me.

"Good old Hawkins!" said Jeckerson, with a chuckle, as he drew a long cigar from his pocket and bit off the end. "You met your match once, then, anyway, Mui Fong."

"I shall come back," said Mui Fong. "Some day I shall come back and play a new tune—how do you say it?—put on a new record—"

"With the record you've got, old fellow," broke in Jeckerson, laughing, "they'll never let you out of jail. Take him away, boys."

They took him away, and I picked up the curtain and began to put it back in its place.

"Hawkins," said Doc Waters, coming over to where I stood on a chair, "you're a wonder."

"Ha!" I laughed, pinning on the first hook of the curtain. "I'd have been a dead wonder if you fellas hadn't come just when you did."

I told them then how it all happened.

"You see, I still have the Chinese coin," I added.

"That's not worth a cent," said Jeckerson. "That coin never had anything to do with it. All that Mui Fong wanted was to scare you boys away from the Cliff Cave. That's why he had the ghost to show itself whenever anybody started to come near the cave."

"I think the coin means something," I said. "I believe that coin is valuable, Jeckerson."

"Not worth a penny!" said Jeckerson, shortly. "Wouldn't give you a straw for it."

"Are we too late?" came a voice from the door. We looked, to see Roy Dobel and his daddy standing there. Jeckerson laughed. But his laugh was a cackle and I knew he was happy.

"Why, no," he said cheerily. "You're just in time to go with us and tell old Judge Granbery that we have caught Mui Fong. And if it's all the same to you, Mr. Dobel, we will postpone our trip to that wonderful cave of yours until to-morrow."

Which we did.

XXIX

On the Trail of the Spider

RIGHT after school we boys went down to our clubhouse and held our meeting as usual. Every boy answered the roll call except Little Sam Burnham and Stan Malapo. Johnny McLarren reported that Little Sam had not been seen since Mr. Malapo took his boys away from our town and hid, fearing the old Chinaman. Bill Darby got up and made a motion that since the Malapo boys had left our town to live somewhere else, and it appeared that Little Sam had gone with them, we ought to drop them and strike their names off our list. Which we did.

"We have a ball game," spoke up our captain, "with the Little-Potatoes-Hard-to-Peel next Saturday, and I want this club to win. Bill Darby has called practice in the hollow. Every boy should report there as soon as this meeting is over."

With that we adjourned. The boys picked up their bats and gloves and followed Bill Darby. Only three boys remained with me—Perry Stokes, Shadow Loomis, and Roy Dobel.

"Why, Roy!" I exclaimed. "You don't mean to tell me you're not going to play in the game with the Little Potatoes next Saturday?"

He waved his hand and nodded.

"I'm goin' to play, all right," he said, "but I was just talkin' to Shadow, here, and he says as we both ought to talk to you before we go down to baseball practice."

"I told him," spoke up Shadow, "that now since

he's got the secret of the entrance to the Cave of Wonders—that is, on this side of the cliffs, y'un'erstand—we ought to make one more trial—"

"Are you sure you know how to enter the cave from this side?" I asked.

"Yeah," answered Roy, nodding, "I went up there with my father yesterday. He was afraid maybe he wouldn't be able to find it back when Jeckerson came to go there with him. So he took me with him and we climbed in."

"So we ought to make one more trial," spoke up Shadow Loomis, "seein' as how we might be able to cash in on it."

"Cash in on it? What do you mean, Shadow?"

"I mean the Spider," said Shadow. "You remember there's a reward of twenty dollars—"

"Fifty dollars!" came a voice from the front room. And the next instant Perry Stokes, feather duster in hand, showed his face between the curtains. "You remember, Hawkins, that detective raised it to fifty dollars, and if we can get hold of that Spider boy, sir, before Jeckerson gets into that cave, I think we should do it, sir."

Shadow Loomis laughed as he looked at Perry.

"There!" he said, turning to me. "And I bet you every boy in this club would tell you to do the same thing. Let's get to the Spider boy's web before Jeckerson. If he captures that little squint-eyed kid himself, we are just out that fifty—that is, it's fifty if Perry's right about it."

"He's right about it," I said, nodding, "but I'm just a little doubtful about going to that old cave again. We were to wait until Jeckerson came to meet Mr. Dobel here, and we were all to go together."

"In that case we are out fifty dollars," snapped Shadow, turning away from me and walking over to the window. I followed him with my eyes, and I must admit I was a bit angry with him. I could have said something nasty to him then as I saw him standing there at the window, his hands shoved into his pockets, gazing out into the green woods as though he didn't care what next I said.

"I'm trying to go slow, Shadow," I said, "so that we won't put our foot into new trouble. If you think we ought to go on one more hunt for the Spider boy, I'll go with you. But I don't think we should go anywhere unless there's a reason. We might go to the cave and not find the Spider boy there."

"I'll bet you a dime he's there," said Shadow, turning swiftly from the window and walking toward my desk. "He's there every afternoon at this time. Didn't we follow him often enough? And didn't we even climb that giant spider web after him and risk our necks trying to get him? All right, now we don't have to take such risk. We can follow Roy Dobel into the safe entrance this side of the cliffs, and get the Spider, and then we will be paid back at least in part for all the trouble we went to. Summer's here and camping time's coming. We can use that fifty dollars for new tenting and things."

"All right," I said, with a wave of my hand, and I reached for my cap. "Are you going to lead us, Roy?"

"What would I be waiting for if I wasn't?" demanded Roy with a grin.

"But does your pop know you are going to show us this new secret entrance?" I asked.

"No, he doesn't. But he can trust me, can't he?

And I can trust you and the other boys here, can't I? What kind o' friends are you if I can't trust you?"

There was nothing more to say. He was right about that. So I went with them down the river path. You couldn't blame them for wanting to get that fifty dollars reward that the detective had offered me for the Spider boy. And the more I thought about it, the better I liked the idea myself. Shadow and Roy led the way, while I walked with Perry Stokes, who had insisted on coming along. And, somehow, I was glad to have him with us.

We made our way to the entrance of Cliff Cave. Roy Dobel sprang in first, drawing out his flashlight as he went and lighting up the dark hole. I expected him to take us far into the cave, far under the hills, to a secret opening. But he turned abruptly to the left as he entered, and then, to my surprise, climbed up a series of steps that I never knew existed. We were right behind him, each of us with our flashlights thrown ahead of us.

"You will have to be very careful," said Roy, as he paused. "Here is the opening, but only one can enter at a time. Take it slow."

And there in the rock his flashlight showed a rugged hole about three feet high by two feet wide. I saw Roy get down on his hands and knees and crawl in. Shadow followed. Then I went next, and Perry behind me. The ground beneath our hands and knees was wet. The wind whistled past us through the narrow place. The air grew colder as we pushed on. And finally we came to a wider place. It seemed not so dark. And as I looked I saw a dull glow coming from beyond, and against this glow was outlined the shapes of Roy and Shadow, standing about ten feet ahead of me. They

called to me and I waited for Perry and, grabbing his hand, I hurried forward.

"Look!" came in Shadow's voice.

It was a sight worth seeing. Two great bronze stands at either end of a huge cavern gave forth a flaming light. The leaping flame threw its ruddy shine on a million sparkling things. The very walls of the cavern seemed to be made of diamonds. From the ceiling hung icicle things that glittered like crystals.

"Come on," said Shadow, but I put my hand on his arm.

"Wait!" I said.

"What for?" he asked impatiently.

"Somebody's here," I said in a low tone. "Those big torches—they would not burn forever, you know. They'd go out if somebody wasn't here to keep them burning."?

"Of course we know that," said Roy with laugh. "It's the Spider boy. Nobody else but him and old Mui Fong lived in this cave, and Mui Fong's gone. Come on!"

"For the fifty dollars reward!" cried Shadow, laughing. But his laugh died suddenly and he stopped short. Somewhere came the sound of a voice.

"Look out!" I said. "Somebody is coming."

We backed away into the shadow. From afar came the sound of a strange voice, echoing from wall to wall and sounding oddly to our ears in that place:

"Sing Hi—Sing Lo—Sing-a-lee,
White man no sing he,
Sing Hi—Sing Lo—Sing-a-lee,
Allee-same-sing-Chinee—"

Roy Dobel laughed.

"It's the Spider boy," he said. "Shadow, you and I heard him this morning—"

"So," I said, "you two were here this morning. Why didn't you tell me?"

"You don't have to go lookin' for arguments, Hawkins," said Shadow, peevishly. "It's the Spider boy singing. Come on, forget your arguments. Let's get him."

"Did you see the Spider boy this morning?" I asked.

"No," said Shadow, "but we followed him in here, and nobody else was seen."

"Don't worry," said Perry Stokes to me, laying his hand upon my arm. "I know the Spider's voice, sir. I am sure it is he."

But Roy and Shadow had pushed on. Down the rocks, into the high and wide Cave of Wonders they went, and Perry and I followed. We didn't need our flashlights now and we put them in our pockets. The light from the great bronze torches lit up the place. And suddenly my heart jumped. It seemed to me that I saw a giant—a giant moving against the far wall of the cavern.

"Look there!" cried Perry under his breath. And for a moment the four of us hesitated.

"By Jingo!" exclaimed Shadow. "That was not here this morning, Roy. It's a shadow, isn't it?"

"Looks like," said Roy, nodding, "but who's making that shadow? Look at it—big as a house."

"It's the Spider," whispered Shadow, turning to us. "The Spider boy is yonder somewheres, and that is his shadow thrown against the cavern wall. Come on, we will sneak up on him and grab him before he knows it."

Well, we sneaked up on him, but we didn't grab

him before he knew it. No, sir! Because that was impossible. The strange people who had used this cave for their hiding place had strange ways of protecting themselves. Now I will tell you what we saw. We crept up steadily until we were face to face with the huge shadow on the wall. And then we turned to our left and we saw—

That which had made the shadow of a giant against the wall was a Chinaman, sitting on a high stool like you see in a bookkeeper's office. And he was waiting for us. Yes, sir. He had been expecting us. For he had his face turned our way when we came up. He sat in a little alcove in the rock before a tall desk, and another torch like the two in the great cave burned beyond the tall desk. All around him were arranged a number of mirrors. No wonder he had been expecting us. He had seen us in the mirrors. And as we stood looking up at his grinning face he called·

"Don't move! Tao Ling shootee! See gun? Yas, nice 'Melican boys no wantee shootee. Tao Ling allee same good to lit'la 'Melican boys. No shootee—look-see!"

Pointed straight at us was a double-barreled shot-gun. We would have been fools to turn and run. We might have escaped with our lives, yes, but not without buck-shot in our skins.

"Watcha wantee?" continued the Chinaman, still grinning, but keeping his shotgun pointed at us. "Why for what you come, look-see? Tao Ling must know, allee same. Big Boss ask Tao Ling. Tao Ling must know what say. Why for what you come?"

"We come for a boy," I answered boldly, for my sudden fright had now passed, and as I looked into the eyes of Tao Ling and considered his grinning face I had

to smile myself. He did not seem as dangerous as he would have us believe him to be.

"No 'Melican boy here," called Tao Ling from his high perch. "You go backee. Come no more to look-see. Tao Ling shootee sure. Go quick!"

"It's not an American boy we are looking for," called Shadow Loomis. "We want the boy who is called the Spider. He climbs the spider web made out of rope that leads into this cave—"

"Oh, allee same Java boy!" broke in Tao Ling, his grin widening and his gun dancing up and down at such a rate that I feared it might go off unexpectedly, and I pulled Perry out of its range. "No. You come too late, look-see. No Java boy here now. Come to-molla, nutha day. Maybe some time allee same good catchee Java boy—"

"Tao Ling," I broke in, "we are sorry we have bothered you. We will go out at once, and you will not be troubled with us any more."

We turned to go, and Tao Ling seemed to grin more broadly than he did before.

"Yas, nice 'Melican boys go," he cried. And I whispered to Shadow to get Perry and Roy out of here while I held Tao Ling's attention. I didn't trust this grinning Chinaman. I did not know but what with all his grimacing and fidgeting that double-barreled gun might go off and spray us all with lead. So while Shadow led Perry and Roy back to the outlet I talked to the yellow man, who watched them as though he expected something to happen.

"Tao Ling," I said, "I am sorry we have broken in upon you. It wasn't nice for American boys, was it?"

"Oh, allee same allight," he said, nodding and grinning. "No makee mucha hap. Tao Ling no wantee

shootee 'Melican boys. Tao Ling likee boys mucha-much."

"Thanks, Tao Ling," I said, smiling, but my smile was a lie. I was trapped and I knew it. I didn't feel any more like smiling than Mui Fong did when he was caught, too. I just couldn't get that out of my head. And I kept turning my head and watching Shadow and Roy and Perry, and I saw them nearing the hole where we had entered.

"Tao Ling," I said, "some day if you need help, call on us boys and we will prove to you that we are your friends."

"Likee much to do," said Tao Ling, nodding his head, and as I turned to leave him I saw the dark shape of a giant shadow nodding on the wall. What a signal that could be, thought I. And then I laughed and turned and waved my hand at Tao Ling.

"Good-by," I said. "I will not forget you, Tao."

"No," called Tao, as he turned back to his high desk and picked up the long brush with which he had been writing when we came in. "No. 'Melican boy not folget Tao Ling. Goo-by fo' litla while."

I looked at him for a moment. He reached forward and seemed to be dipping his brush into an ink pot. At the same time I heard a bell ring. I laughed and started for the hole through which we had come. But I stopped short in my tracks!

The bell was still ringing. I turned quickly. Tao Ling still had his brush dipped into the ink pot. And then I turned my head again toward the opening.

Yes, it was true. Tao Ling had not dipped into the ink. That was only a fake. He had dipped the brush into an ink pot, to be sure. But there was no ink in that pot. No. There was nothing in that ink

pot but a little button—a button which he pressed and which rang a bell that called somebody else.

A line of Chinamen stood in front of me.

"I want to get out," I said, and the Chinaman nearest me grinned at me, an evil grin, as he slowly shook his head.

"No gettee out," he said. "Mui Fong has sent message—catchee boy who catchee him. We glad to see you, Seckatelly Hawkins, glad to see you, yas—sa. Take him!"

A half dozen Chinamen fell upon me. What use for me to fight? One of them could have done me. And so they had me, and they took me—where do you think?

I'll tell you where they took me, and then you can see how strangely things will turn out. Into that same little off-cave where once not so long ago we had found John Malapo chained to the wall—there they took me. To the very same chains from which I had helped John Malapo escape they bound me to the cavern's rocky wall. And there they left me in the dark. I tried my chains, tugged this way and that, but I was fast. Until somebody came to undo these iron bonds I was a prisoner.

How long I lay there, hoping and praying, I'll not be able to tell you. But at last I heard a sound. It seemed as if hours had passed, but when I saw Shadow Loomis brought in, I knew it must have been only a short time. Two Chinamen came ahead with torches, while three others bound Shadow to chains beside me.

"Well," I said, after we were left alone, "here we are."

"Yeah," said Shadow, "here we are."

"How did they get you?" I asked. "I thought you had got away with Perry and Roy."

"No," said Shadow in a low tone, and I knew he didn't want to talk. "I got Perry and Roy out safe, but I couldn't save myself. But don't be uneasy. Roy knows they got me, and of course we all knew they had you. That dirty sneak who calls himself Tao Ling, on the high stool, he gave the alarm—"

"Sure," I broke in. "When he stuck his brush into the ink pot, it rang a bell."

"Well," said Shadow savagely, "I'm not afraid. Roy's goin' right up to tell his daddy and tell him what we saw. Lucky Roy got away, and Perry. They'll bring enough guys back here to get us out in a little while, unless—unless—"

"Unless what?"

"Good heavens, Hawkins!" exclaimed Shadow. "What if they don't get out! Supposin' the tunnel they've got to crawl through caves in on 'em—"

"Quit that supposin' business!" I cried as I wriggled uneasily and clanked the chains to which I was bound. "We've got to quit supposin' and hope that they'll come soon."

Which we did.

XXX

Prisoners of Hi Shang

I NEVER will forget those hours I spent in the prison cave with Shadow Loomis. There we were, bound with iron chains to the cavern wall, where the Chinaman had left us, not knowing what would happen next. I was glad at first that I had Shadow with me. But when I thought of him there tied to the rock, I wished that it was I alone who was chained. We talked a little at first, but it was totally dark. We could not see each other, and the more we talked, the gloomier we got, so at last neither of us spoke.

"Shadow!" I called softly, at last.

"Yes, Hawkins," he answered, trying to make his voice sound cheerful, but I caught a note of fear in the sound.

"How do you feel?"

"I'm all right, Seck. These chains are heavy, though."

"I know, Shad, but we'll be out soon. We can't stay in this darkness forever, you know. There's bound to be a ray of light coming in shortly now."

"Do you think so?"

"Don't worry, Shadow. Roy Dobel has by this time got to Doc Waters or his daddy or somebody. They will come for us. They'll get us out of here if—"

There was a tense silence for a moment.

"Go on," said Shadow, "tell me what you are afraid of."

"I'm afraid of those Chinamen," I said in a low

voice, "because they might be able to close up the entrance through which we came."

Another moment of silence in the dark. Then Shadow's soft voice:

"Yes, they might do that. It was a narrow hole. One stroke of a pick, and the whole roof would cave in and block the entrance."

"That's what I'm afraid of, Shad," I told him. "But let's hope against it. We'll not get anywhere if we don't."

Nothing more was said for five minutes. I suppose we were both thinking the same thing. What fools we were to come into this cavern, knowing that Mui Fong and his Chinese followers had their meeting place here. Mui Fong had been caught. That had been the thing that made us feel so safe. Why hadn't we figured also that Mui Fong might have many others who would be only too glad to carry out his plans?

"Hawkins," came Shadow's voice in the dark, "how do you think Mui Fong sent a message to these Chinamen that we had caught him?"

"Ask me something easy," I answered, "but don't ask me how Chinamen send messages to one another. They knew even that it was I who had done it. They figured on catching me somehow, some time. And here I had to go and walk right into their parlor, like the spider told the fly to do."

"I'm sorry," came Shadow's voice, "sorry that I helped to get you in this fix, Seck. But I meant well. I hoped we would catch that Spider boy and earn the fifty dollars reward for his capture."

"That's all right, Shad," I said, "we might have caught him and got the reward. But I have a sneaking notion that it was that very Spider boy who gave us

away. He is a slick one. He is the best spy Mui Fong ever had. And he hates me, Shadow. He would do me the worst trick he could if he had the chance. And I suppose he had his chance and took it. That's why we are here now."

"I'd like to get my hands on him," said Shadow fiercely.

"That wouldn't do you much good," I said with a laugh. "Shadow, we gave the Spider boy some hot times, and we are getting paid back. Let me give you this one thought now while we are chained to the wall here in the dark. That no matter what you do, some day you will get paid for it. If you do good, you will get paid good; but if you do bad, you will get paid back in the same way."

And then again there was another long silence in the dark. And I suppose Shadow fell to thinking himself. At least I did. And I fell to thinking of that miserable little Spider boy. He was the one, after all, to whom I owed all my misfortune. If he had not spied around our clubhouse and tried to steal the Chinese bad-luck coin that I owned, we would never have got in as much trouble as we had experienced these last few months. If the Spider boy had not been worth fifty dollars to Jeckerson, the Watertown officer, we would not have risked ourselves into this cavern to-day. Believe me, I said to myself, if I ever had a chance again to lay my hands on this miserable Spider's boy neck, I would give him the worst beating I ever gave any boy, and after that I would take him up to Jeckerson and tell him to keep the fifty dollars reward.

By Jinks! that mad was I when suddenly there came a soft footfall tapping on the rocky stair to our prison, and the faintest glow of light.

"Shadow," I whispered, "be careful! Somebody's coming!"

Together we held our chains and stood close, lest the noise of the clanking iron would attract attention of the one who came with the light into our dark place. The flare of the torch showed us two figures approaching. One was Tao Ling, the one whom we had seen on the tall stool, whose shadow had fallen upon the wall like that of a black giant. The other was a proud, fat, old Chinaman, in whose hand the flaming torch shook, throwing its flickering light about us like a shower of snowflakes.

"Which is it the one?" he asked of his companion. And Tao Ling pointed to me.

"'Melican boy talkee mucha, no say anyt'ing," said Tao Ling, his finger in my eye. "Him one, mos' honorable Hi Shang!"

Hi Shang! That name! My mind went back to the days of Ching Toy, when I had helped my little Chinese friend out of the clutches of this terrible old man.

There came a chuckle from the fat throat of Hi Shang.

"The god of my honorable grandfather told me I would find thee, Seckatelly Hawkins," he said, "and see, his word comes true. Long since you betrayed me and my loyal Mui Fong into the hands of our enemies. Now the time is come when we shall pay you for everything that you have done. Are you prepared?"

I could not answer him. A lump had risen in my throat. My heart pounded loudly against my shirt. My hair seemed like wire standing up straight from my head as I gazed into the dreadful face of that aged Chinaman, whose eyes, in the glare of the shaking torch which he held, gleamed evilly upon me.

"You do not talk!" cried Hi Shang. "Nay, I wonder not. You, who have again cast the nets of the white man's law around the feet of Mui Fong—you cannot speak because you are so base. But be assured, I have learned the white man's ways, and I know how to talk. Perhaps I can talk for you. Shall I speak?"

"No," I cried. "I shall speak for myself. I have not done these things. I have done only one thing. I have done only that which anyone would do for his fellow man, Hi Shang. Listen to me."

"You are afraid now," said Hi Shang, smiling blandly. "Now you are afraid lest you lose your own life—"

"Not if I had to lose it for my friends," I broke in. "But if you will listen to me I will prove that I did that which anyone would do for his friends, Hi Shang—even you."

"No matter," came Hi Shang's voice as he turned away. "To-morrow's sun shall not shine into your open eyes. Or, if they be open, they shall not be able to see—"

"I shall be able to see you," I cried. "Even if I am not here, Hi Shang, I shall be able to see where you are, and I shall point you out, and they will take you—"

He was gone. Once again there was darkness. Shadow's voice came faintly.

"He is a terrible man, Hawkins."

"He is a fool," I said, for I was angry. I jerked my chains, but they held me tight. "He is a double fool, Shadow. He will lose in the end, even though we die here."

"We must not die here, Hawkins," muttered Shadow.

"We won't," I assured him. "Rest easy, Shad. We'll get out. Doc and Jeckerson will come soon."

But they didn't come. No. Nobody came. I began

to wonder then what caused the delay. Surely somebody would hunt for us.

"Shadow," I said, "are you sure Roy Dobel and Perry Stokes got out safe?"

"Absolutely sure," came Shadow's reply in the dark. "I saw them reach the daylight before the Chinamen grabbed me."

"Are you sure they were not grabbed outside?"

But here Shadow remained silent. He had not thought of that. Perhaps you cannot blame a fellow for not knowing everything. Yet I blamed Shadow for this. I scolded him for it. I called him all the names I could think of. I told him I thought he was the worst sort of a pal a boy could have—one who was trusted, yet not worth being trusted. And finally I stopped talking and the darkness seemed to close around us like a wall. Neither of us said a word. Shadow did not know I was there. Neither did I know he was with me, so silent was it and so dark.

"Sing Hi—Sing Lo—Sing-a-lee,
White man no sing he.
Sing Hi—Sing Lo—Sing-a-lee,
Allee-same-sing Chinee—"

The song of the solitary Chinaman, Tao Ling, who had kept guard in this cave, came to our ears. As we listened, it seemed as though the voice was going farther and farther away. Fainter and fainter it grew, until finally it died out.

For a few moments there was a deathly silence. Not the slightest movement could be heard. And then suddenly, from some corner, came a scraping sound. I heard Shadow sit up as quickly as I did. We both

cocked our ears and listened. Again came the sound, a footfall on the rocky steps to our prison.

"Sit tight," I whispered to Shadow.

The next instant a shadow fell across the opening to the little off-cave in which we lay. It was the shadow of somebody who carried a lantern. At last, thought I, some of our own people are coming to our help. But I drew back with a cry as I saw who it was.

Good night! The one who carried the lantern, the one who was coming into our alcove cave, the one who walked like a white man—it was none other than the Spider boy—the very one whom we had come to capture down in these sparkling caves.

"Ah!" he cried, as his lantern light struck my face. "It is Hawkins, the Seckatary. I had thought it to be the white man, the detective from Watertown. Now see here, we must get thee loose, boy. Steady, hold still while I get thee down."

"Let go!" I cried. "Let go of those chains, Spider."

"Why?" he asked, his eyes turned upon me with a look of surprise, while he worked with a quick hand at the chains. "Why? When I know the combination of these locks, why should I leave thee to perish, my friend? I am not a fiend, like these Chinese. I am a Javanese boy, and I have the education got from everywhere. You mistake me, Hawkins, the Seckatary. I am your friend, though you know it not. I am for a fact, and I'm talking plain English, too. I say now, can you pull that loose? See if you can. Pull!"

I pulled. The chain came loose. I was free.

In a few seconds he had Shadow liberated. Then he turned to me and held out a long, thin hand, whose fingers were tipped with long, curling nails.

"Well," he said, "you had better go now. Hi Shang

has gone, and with him Tao Ling. All the others are gone. I alone am left in charge of the place. But they might come back any moment. Now you had better go."

He went out of our little prison alcove. I stretched my arms and Shadow Loomis came behind me. We walked to the great floor of the Cave of Wonders, and there in the light of those great copper torches we stopped.

"Spider," I said, "I give you credit. You are one fine kid. If ever I chase a boy for a reward again, I'll first make sure that he is worth chasing."

"Am I not worth chasing, friend?" he asked with a grin. "I am China-Java boy. I am English, too. I speak all talks in one. No word is too big for me."

I laughed as I stepped forward and patted him on the shoulder.

"You are too big for me," I said. "I am sorry I ever chased you, Spider. Good-by."

"Yes, good-by," he said, curling his long nails around my hand as we shook. "I hope you have luck—lots of luck—and no more Chinese coins—"

"Listen!" I exclaimed.

Shadow, who had been following our conversation with some disgust, suddenly perked up his ears. The sound of voices and slowly approaching footsteps.

"It's Doc Waters!" cried Shadow Loomis. "Look, Hawkins, here they come! And Roy Dobel's daddy! Look, Hawkins!"

I looked and I saw. I turned to the Spider.

"One good turn deserves another," I said to him. "The man who will be here in another minute is willing to give fifty dollars reward for your capture."

"Well," said the Spider boy, smiling up at me, "you

might as well take the money, Seckatary Hawkins. If somebody is going to get it, I'd rather it was thee, my friend."

"You're crazy," I said, as I took his sleeve and dragged him away into the shadows. "I'm not going to let anybody earn that reward, Spider. Think of a way to get out of here quick. Quick, before they come!"

The Spider hesitated only a second. He looked up into my face, and I saw in his eyes the reflection of the flame in the great bronze torch that stood behind me. And in that look was real gratitude; yet what was it, but to give him what he deserved?

"Come, then," he said hastily, taking my hand. "I will show thee, friend of mine."

Shadow ran forward toward the sound of the voices that were now growing louder. But I ran back with the Spider boy—up to the left, a few rocky steps, being fairly dragged along by the Spider, who certainly was a speedy traveler, even after we struck the dark passage where the light of the torches died out, and we fell upon hands and knees and crawled. It seemed to be an unending journey. But finally we stopped, and I heard the Spider fumbling around in the dark. The next instant there was a sliding sound as a rock came inward and daylight came through the opening.

"Great guns!" I exclaimed. "Where are we?"

"Ha!" laughed the Spider merrily. "You should know this place. You chased me to it often enough. Well, at last I find it to be of great help. My friend, I leave thee now. I crawl out of this hole once more and onto my great spider web, and so to freedom. This is the last time. No more will the Spider boy climb the great spider web. Farewell, Seckatary Hawkins. Take this end of rope. It is all I ask of thee. And when my

whistle comes clear, pull it. Then will the spider web disappear, never to be seen again."

He laughed happily, I thought, as he slid through the opening and was gone. I felt a tug at the rope end in my hand. And I knew then from the regular tugs that followed that he was going up the giant spider web to the top of the cliff and safety. He was free from the cave, free from Mui Fong, free from everything that had held him a slave. The Spider boy was gone, and I had helped him to escape, and I was glad of it!

Then came his whistle, clear and loud, and I pulled on the rope as I backed away from the opening. And through the little irregular patch of daylight came the long lines of rope, the old spider web being pulled back into the cave, as Mui Fong used to do after he had sent out the Spider boy on some errand or another. And with the last of the ropes the rock swung again into place, and I was in the dark. I dropped the rope and turned around and crawled swiftly back the way I had come.

They were all standing together in the Cave of Wonders, and in the light of the two great torches I could see their faces—Jeckerson, Doc Waters, Roy Dobel's daddy, and all the boys of our club. Shadow had already told them all. A stone slid out from under my foot as I stepped into the light again, and they all turned and waited for me. And as I came down the few rocky steps into the cavern, Jeckerson spoke.

"Hawkins," he said, "when will you ever take warning? Didn't you know that this cave was unsafe for boys to wander in—"

"Don't scold him, Doc," broke in Roy Dobel's daddy. "You can't blame a boy for wanting to see a cave like this. Why, everybody in the world will want

to see it. I think I'll charge a dollar to see it. What do you say, Jeckerson?"

"If you don't get out of here pretty quick," answered Jeckerson with a grin, "you won't live to charge a cent for it. Now, there's not much time to lose. Hey, you boys, come here."

He called to a great crowd of shadows that stood against the rear wall. And they came forward, and in the light of the torches I saw that each one carried a gun. They were deputy officers that Jeckerson had with him.

"See that all these people get out of here safely," said Jeckerson to his officers, "and don't any of you dare stick your nose in this cave again until to-morrow. I have found out that Hi Shang and his gang of Chinamen gather here, and I intend to capture every one of 'em to-night, and after that, Mr. Dobel, maybe you can make your plans what to do with this cave. Now all of you turn about face and get out of this cave as quick as you possibly can."

Which we did.

XXXI

The Wonder of Wonders

THESE are the minutes of the meeting held to-day in our little old clubhouse on the river bank:

Dick Ferris, our captain, called the meeting to order, and asked Lew Hunter to play a piece on the old organ to celebrate the beginning of vacation.

So Lew struck up the opening chords, and then there came an interruption. Noisy shuffle of footsteps on our porch, and the door roughly shoved open. And when we saw that it was the Pelham boys from across the river, the boys were ready to fight.

"What's the idea, Briggen?" I asked in a soft voice, because I didn't want to have a big fight in our clubhouse.

"This mornin'," began Briggen, "we saw that detective from Watertown take a lot of Chinamen out of Cliff Cave. So I guess they found the Cave of Wonders, and there hain't no use for us fellas to try to get it."

"You are always a little too late, aren't you, Briggen?" I said. "Seems like neither your gang nor ours will have the Cave of Wonders for a meeting place. Well, we all had a lot of fun searching for it, anyway, didn't we? Even though we didn't get any reward—"

Poor old Ham Gardner, Briggen's side-partner, stepped out of the Pelham crowd.

"Thar' war' a reward put up fer a kid as war' called the Spider," said Ham. "We'uns like to take a try at it."

"What do you mean?" I asked. "The Spider boy

was wanted, of course, but now everything's over. The cave is discovered and claimed, and the Chinamen and the Spider are gone."

"Not the Spider," said Ham, shaking his head. "He ain't gone. The cops didn't get him. We just figured mebbe you'd tell us who war' the man who'd pay the reward fer the Spider—"

"Jeckerson;" I said. "It was Jeckerson who offered the reward for the Spider. Now you and Briggen get your pals out of this clubhouse and back to your side of the river as quick as you can."

Without another word the Pelham gang left.

When the meeting was over, the boys wended their way to the baseball lot, while I went back into my little writing room to write the minutes.

About four o'clock in the afternoon Jeckerson came in, accompanied by Doc Waters. I slung my pen down so fast that the point stuck in the desk, as I turned around to greet them.

"You're a great detective, Jeckerson!" I shouted. "Heard all about you capturing the Chinamen in the Cave of Wonders. Did you get Hi Shang?"

"Got 'em all, my boy," sang out Jeckerson lightly, as he stepped over and clapped me on the shoulder. "And the only reason I came down here now was to tell you that I thank you from the bottom of my heart. I believe you did more to help me lay my hands on this bunch of trouble-makers than anyone I can think of. You captured Mui Fong yourself—"

"If you hadn't come in when you did," I broke in, "little credit would I have coming."

"Nevertheless," said Jeckerson, "I know what help you gave me. I have them all, and they are safely behind doors that will not open for a long, long time. I've

got every last one in the crowd except that little Spider boy, and I don't want him, poor little kid!"

I stepped up and offered him my hand.

"Shake!" I said.

Jeckerson looked at me with raised eyebrows.

"Why?" he asked. "I thought you and the Spider boy were enemies, Hawkins. Now it seems you are glad he was the one that wasn't caught."

"I am," I said. "Time was when the Spider boy and I were enemies—that is, I thought we were. But it was only this bad-luck coin that came between us—"

I drew open the desk drawer and picked out the little Chinese coin.

Jeckerson laughed.

"You and that coin!" he cried. "Listen to him, Doc Waters! He still believes in that bad-luck coin! Can you beat it?"

Doc joined in the laughter. But I kept a straight face.

"This has been a bad-luck coin," I said, "and I'll always believe that."

"You've been fooled, Hawkins," laughed Jeckerson, slapping his knee. "Old Mui Fong kept you guessing all the time—to throw you off the track. He made you think that it was the old Chinese coin he was after. He didn't want you ever to come up into his cave. That's why he had one of his men play ghost on the cliff. But the coin! No! It isn't worth even one good penny of Uncle Sam's."

I looked at Jeckerson for a few seconds while I thought it over, but I shook my head.

"No," I said, "I think this coin is valuable. There wouldn't have been so much fuss about it if it weren't."

"Forget that old coin, Hawkins," said Jeckerson.

"All your troubles are over now. Mui Fong will never get his hands on you. You can walk the streets without fear. Take that old Chinese coin and throw it over your left shoulder for luck, and don't look where it goes. Don't ever bother about it again."

"No," I said. "I made up my mind a long time ago that some day I would make this bad-luck coin bring good luck to me. I will keep it."

"All right," said Jeckerson, patting me on the shoulder, "keep it, old fella, for a keepsake. It will remind you of the days you helped old Jeck out of a tight place. But come along. We are going over to the cave for the last time before Mr. Dobel takes possession of it. I think he intends to give sight-seeing tours in it now for a dollar a crack. And I imagine he will grow rich, too, now that all the newspapers have carried the stories about the Chinamen's doings in it. D'y'want to go?"

"Of course," I said. "Who wouldn't want to go? Maybe the next time I want to go I'll have to pay Mr. Dobel a dollar to get in."

About fifteen minutes later we stood in the Cave of Wonders. But it was dark. No longer was the brilliant place lighted by the two great bronze torches that the Chinamen always had burning. Now it seemed dark and gloomy, a dismal place, where you expected bats to fly in your face and owls to hoot at you from dark corners. But Jeckerson slid away from us quickly, and in a few moments a light flared up and I saw him atop one of the great torches, which he had lit with a match. He climbed down quickly and ran to the other at the farther end of the cavern. This, too, he lit, and once again we gazed upon the sparkling brilliance of this wonderful cave.

"Some place!" exclaimed Doc Waters, as we stood

together viewing the beautiful underground chamber. "Isn't this some place! Look how the light sparkles on the walls! Every color of the rainbow."

"It seems to me," I said, "that such a beautiful place as this must have some wonderful secret. In the middle of all this beauty there must be some rich treasure."

For a moment no one spoke. Then Jeckerson gave a short chuckle, but it was short by reason of the sound that came to interrupt it. There came a noise as of falling stones—and then boys' voices.

"Shove him ahead!" came a boy's voice. "Hit him over the head if he won't."

And then, from the few rocky steps that led to the little opening on the cliff side there came a line of boys. I recognized the first one in an instant. It was Briggen, the leader of the Pelham boys, from across the river.

As they saw us they came to a standstill. Then they surged forward and I saw—

I saw the Spider boy in their midst. Ham Gardner and Dave Burns holding him, and behind them came the rest of their raggedy gang.

"Jeckerson!" cried Briggen, running up to where we stood. "We got your Spider fella. We caught him just now as he was starting up the spider web out there on the cliff, and we come to claim the fifty dollars reward you offered for him. Here he is. Take him."

They shoved the Spider boy forward.

"I don't happen to want him," said Jeckerson. "Boys, you've gone and done all this work for nothing. I don't want the Spider—nobody wants him. That's been the trouble all along. Come here, boy."

The Spider boy stepped forward. Jeckerson looked down at him for an instant. Then, raising his eyes, he

looked at the Pelham boys, and pointing his finger toward the place whence they had come, he said:

"You others get out of here as quickly as you can."

Briggen and his crew eyed me with a savage look, but they turned and, somewhat crestfallen, they went out the way they had come in. Then Jeckerson turned his eyes again on the Spider boy.

"Poor little fella!" he said, reaching out and putting his hand on the Spider's head. "Poor little fella!"

And then he turned away. The Spider boy looked up at me.

"He doesn't want me, does he, friend?" he asked in a quiet voice.

"No, Spider," I said, "nobody wants you"

The Spider boy smiled faintly.

"You are right," he said, "nobody wants me. Nobody ever wanted me since Mui Fong killed my father. I've been trying ever since to do something—but never mind, friend, you have been good to me. That is enough. I had to come back—just once more. But now I'll go, and I'll never come back again. Good-by."

"Good-by," I said as I shook his hand, "and take this with you. It's been a bad-luck thing for me, but maybe it will bring good luck to you, and it will remind you of me when you are far away."

I pressed into his hand the Chinese coin—that old copper penny with the square hole in the center, that had brought bad luck to me and to everybody else who ever owned it. He took it and gazed at it in the light of one of the bronze torches.

"By the Great Joss!" he exclaimed. "It is the real coin! Oh, by my grandfather's single tooth! I thought it had been lost, lost! Oh! Oh! Oh! Here it is! What pain and trouble it would have saved me! Oh!"

The Spider came close to me and, taking my hand, he slapped the Chinese coin into my palm.

"It is yours, my friend," he said, looking into my eyes. "I shall not take it now, after Mui Fong has gone. You caught Mui Fong, therefore you did me a great service. And therefore I shall show thee something that will astound thee, my friend, Seckatary Hawkins."

For a breathless moment he faced me. Then he leaped away into the dark corners that could not be reached by the flaming torches. Together we all sped after him, wondering. And he stood at last before a blank wall, his upraised hand against a single dark slab about one foot square.

"Behind this," he said, "lies the secret! The wonder of wonders!"

"What now?" called out Jeckerson, but his voice was shaking, and I knew that Jeckerson was remembering what he had told me back in the clubhouse.

"Only one thing," cried out the Spider, "can gain entrance to this wonder of wonders—and you have it, Seckatary Hawkins. Hand me the coin."

I handed it to him quickly, although my hand was shaking like a leaf in the wind. He took it with a hand that shook as much as mine, and raising it, he tapped nervously for a few seconds upon the stone. Then suddenly I heard a metallic sound, a rattle and a whirring as of many clock springs, and there before our eyes the great stone began to move. The metallic noise began to grow louder, I heard a jingling sound as of a coin dropping behind the stone. There before us, growing ever larger, was a dark, gaping hole.

"Good heavens!" I heard Jeckerson exclaim. "What do you think of that, Doc Waters?"

What did they think of it? You should have seen

what they thought of it as soon as the Spider boy shot through the opening, striking a match as he did so. Like a firefly we saw the match flit hither and thither, then dart suddenly to one spot. The next instant a light flared out in the cavern. By Jinks! here was another one of those great bronze torches, and in a few seconds another was flaming, where the Spider boy had lighted it, and soon two more—four great torches lit up this great hall of underground splendor. Oh, boy! if we thought our first Cave of Wonders was worth seeing, what was this! Five times the size, and a thousand times more beautiful.

"The Chinese coin!" I cried out. "By Jinks! Jeckerson, I told you that coin was good for something."

"Come here," called the Spider boy, and we went over to where he stood beside a niche in the wall. He pulled out a small leather-covered casket from the hollow space in the wall. "The treasure of the tong," he said.

I took the casket and laid it down on my knees, and there in the light from one of those immense torches I slowly opened it. Gold! Gold money of all kinds, of all countries of the world—nice new gold pieces of Uncle Sam's and faded old gold pieces of other nations—all together, mixed up in this old leather-covered casket.

"Now I must go," said the Spider. "Nobody will want me from now on—"

'Wait!" I cried, springing up. The casket slid off my knees and the gold fell ringing on the rocky floor. "Wait, Spider, wait—"

But the Spider boy was gone. He didn't wait. Nobody wanted him, he believed, so he was going. The last I ever saw of the Spider boy was as he disappeared through the opening of this second and more wonderful

Cave of Wonders. By the time I had reached the opening, he had gone through the passage. He was on his way. Nobody wanted him.

Slowly I came back. Doc and Jeckerson were picking up the scattered coins. I watched them carelessly.

"Well," said Jeckerson, "this ends the story of the Cave of Wonders. By the way, Hawkins, if I'm not mistaken, this bigger and more beautiful cave is going to belong to you boys. Mr. Dobel may have his cave, the smaller one outside, but I really do believe that this greater cavern can be claimed by you and your fellow club members if you tell the judge about it. And besides, I think that you boys are going to have the pleasure of adding some of this gold money to your club treasury."

Which we did.

XXXII

The End of the Chinese Coin

THE boys all said I was the best member the club ever had, but of course I just smiled and let them have their say. I knew it was only because of the new cave I had discovered, and they always talk big like that when they are happy about something. I had told them that old Judge Granbery would give us the rights to the new cave, and they figured it would be a fine place to have some fun, and of course that made them feel like praising me. So now I was the best member our club ever had. Yes, but in a few days I might have to lay down new rules for them to follow which they might not like. And then they would be saying, most likely, that I was the hardest one to get along with.

Ah well, such is life. Roy Dobel's daddy had come down earlier in the day to ask me about my new cave. How was I going to get into it?

"Why," I said, "through the Cave of Wonders."

"That," said Mr. Dobel, with a thin smile, "belongs to me."

He hadn't said any more. But I saw trouble coming. In order to get into the new cave which I had discovered it was necessary to go through the Cave of Wonders. Then when you had traveled across the big main floor of the Cave of Wonders, you would find yourself standing beside a great dark stone, and to the left of this stone, almost invisible to eyes that did not know where to look for it, was a thin slot. Into this slot you must first drop the old Chinese coin, the old bad-luck penny

that had given me plenty to worry about in the last few months, and when that old coin fell into the slot, it set in motion some hidden works that slowly raised the great stone and opened the only entrance to the new cave, which the Spider boy, who had shown me the secret, called the "Wonder of Wonders."

The leather casket that the Spider boy had also shown me was taken by Jeckerson, the Watertown detective, to old Judge Granbery, because, he said, that casket contained stolen money, and much of it would be claimed by companies that had been robbed by the Mui Fong gang. However, he promised me that there was a reward offered by each firm, and a handsome sum of money would be due me. I told Jeckerson that it wasn't really mine; that the Spider boy had really been the one who had shown me where to find it, and that the Spider boy was entitled to the rewards. But Jeckerson said that inasmuch as the Spider boy had disappeared, I was next entitled to the reward money.

"Well," said I to Shadow Loomis, after meeting to-day, as we sat together in my little writing room, "I feel happy, anyway. I always said I would make that old bad-luck coin bring good luck to me some day, and I've done it."

"It certainly is wonderful," said Shadow slowly. "I don't suppose anybody would believe us if we told them about the strange happenings around this old river bank. And I guess we'll never be able to explain some of the things."

"No," I said, "there's no chance to find out. The boys who could tell us something about the strange doings on the cliffs and in the caves are gone. I mean the Malapo boys and Little Sam. Jeckerson says he has hunted all around for them, but can't find a trace."

"They probably will never want to see this place again," said Shadow. "Well, we have nothing more to worry about, have we?"

"Not now," I said, "but we might have in a few minutes."

For I had looked out of the window. A group of men were coming down the river path toward our clubhouse. Judge Granbery and Jeckerson walked ahead, Doc Waters and Mr. Dobel were right behind them, and trailing the four was our old sheriff. Old Judge Granbery thumped along the path with his hickory stick, and carried under his left arm the leather casket that we had found in the new cave.

"Well," snapped old Judge Granbery, as he came up the porch steps, "I see you're here, Hawkins. I wasn't expectin' to find you. Kind-a thought you'd be down at that new cave, noseyin' around and stickin' your foot into trouble."

"Not me," I said, laughing. "I did take the boys down there this morning, Judge, just to show them the place and to get my coin back."

"Your what?" asked the judge.

"The old Chinese coin," I said. "You know, it's the key to the new cave."

"Humph!" grunted the Judge. "Little good it'll do to have the key if you can't get to the door it opens. Seems like Mr. Dobel has you barred, Hawkins."

"Yeah," I said, "that's the way it seems."

Mr. Dobel, who was standing over in a corner talking to Doc Waters, acted as though he didn't hear, but I know he heard, all right.

"Call a meeting," said the old Judge impatiently. "Why aren't the other boys here?"

I went to the door and whistled—the old trilling

whistle that all the boys know for my call. And in a little while they came up from the river, where they had been preparing the canvas for our vacation tent, and painting canoes, and such things, getting ready for our summer camp.

They all quickly took their places. Dick Ferris, our captain, gave his chair at the head of the table to old Judge Granbery. Doc Waters sat on his left, and I sat next to Doc. The other boys saw to it that all the men had seats. And the boys who had to stand moved over against the wall and stood with arms folded.

"Now," began the Judge, gazing at the leather-covered casket on the table before him, "seems like you boys did yourselves proud for once in your lives and helped my friend, Mr. Jeckerson, capture a very bad gang of men who had been stealing money. For that I have come down here to say that I am proud of you —every one."

He looked at me out of the corner of his eye as though he wanted to catch me smiling, but I kept a straight face.

"In this box," and he tapped the leather casket as he continued, "was nearly a hundred thousand dollars worth of gold money from every country in the world. Mr. Jeckerson has already identified all of it, and it has been claimed by those companies in Watertown that had been robbed of it. What is left over in this box, however, is the total amount of rewards that were offered, amounting to nine hundred and fifty dollars, and this goes to the one who found the casket of stolen money."

There was a happy grin on every boy's face, and some of them even said, "Attaboy, Hawkins!" or "Hooray for Seck!" But the old Judge continued to talk.

"Boys," he said, and his voice was softer, "I have always called you my junior police. And though there have been times when I had to scold you, I have always trusted you, because I knew you would live up to my hopes. I am proud of you, every one. And you, Mr. Jeckerson?"

He turned to the detective.

"I take my hat off to your junior police, Judge," said Jeckerson with a smile. "Without them I could not have turned the trick. They all helped, every one; but it was Hawkins who really had enough faith in the old Chinese coin, you see. All the rest of us laughed at that bad-luck coin and thought Hawkins was silly. But he stuck to his belief that the old coin was the real key to the whole mystery. And by George! it was. If it hadn't been for that, you see, we would never have found the cave in which all this stolen money was hidden."

The Judge was smiling broadly now as he turned to me.

"Seckatary Hawkins," he said, and he smiled at me across the table. "How familiar that nickname sounds! Ever since he was no bigger'n a grasshopper Doc Waters and I called him 'Seckatary Hawkins.' And every boy for miles around knows him. Hawkins, my boy, you always get by somehow, no matter what the odds against you. Do you know why?"

"No, Judge," I answered, "I don't know exactly, unless I'm just naturally lucky."

"Not a bit lucky," snapped the Judge. "You're never lucky at all, but you use your head. You think before you act. You 'figure out' everything, as you call it, and it has always helped you. You believed the Chinese coin was worth something because you thought

it over carefully and put two and two together. And as a reward for that you get the money that remains in this leather chest, and with it the gratitude of those whose stolen goods you recovered."

He shoved the leather casket over to me amid the cheering and hand clapping that followed his remarks, but I felt a little confused.

"I thank you, Judge," I said, as soon as the noise stopped. "Not so much for the money as for the kind words you said about our club. We are proud to know you call us your junior police, and we always try to keep law and order around this old river bank, but sometimes fights will come, and then we must take our own part. We can't stand by and let a fellow member of this club get a licking. So you see how it is. Every boy in this club sticks to the rest of 'em; that's our first big rule—'Stick together.' And we try to keep out of trouble and fights, because our next rule is, 'Use common sense.' And our last rule is, 'Do the right thing always,' and it just comes to my mind that the right thing to do right now is for you to divide up this money to each and every fella in this club, Judge. I don't get the credit for all that was done. I couldn't have done it if the other fellas in this club hadn't stuck to me, you see. So I ask you, please, to divide it up."

The Judge looked up at Jeckerson and smiled. I saw Doc Waters look at me, and he, too, was grinning. Even the sheriff, who was chewing tobacco, spat out of the window so he could smile. Everybody but Mr. Dobel; he didn't smile.

"Too bad there's not an even thousand, Jeckerson," said the Judge. "Each boy could get a hundred dollars then. You see, there's just ten boys in my junior police force."

And then Mr. Dobel smiled.

"I'll make a proposition," he said.

And the Judge, who had opened the leather casket and was about to count out the coins, paused to look up at the speaker.

"Make it!" snapped the Judge.

"I'll add enough to that box so that each boy can have two hundred," said Mr. Dobel, "provided the boys will agree to turn over to me the old Chinese coin, and with it all their claims to the new cave which they call the Wonder of Wonders. That is my proposition."

"It's worth more than you offer, Mr. Dobel," spoke up Doc Waters, who had not said a word up to this time. "You have not seen the cave yet, but both Jeckerson and I can tell you that it is worth a great deal more than the amount you offer."

Mr. Dobel shook his head.

"I wouldn't have to pay a cent," said Mr. Dobel, "if I went to court with it. The cave is right under my farm, and Judge Granbery knows—"

"I know you will offer more," broke in Judge Granbery, with one of his sarcastic smiles. "Come on, Mr. Dobel. Wouldn't you rather see the money go to these boys than to the lawyers who would have to take care of your case? You know you might claim ownership, but you could not claim the key to the cave, which is the Chinese coin, and that belongs to Hawkins."

But I got up before this argument could get further, and I walked over to Mr. Dobel.

"Your boy belongs to our club, Mr. Dobel," I said, "and we all like Roy. And just because we don't want to be fighting any of our club members I'm going to speak for this club and give you this."

I held out to him the old Chinese coin.

"There's your coin," I said, "and glad I am to be rid of it at last."

"Wait a minute," said Roy Dobel, getting up as he saw his daddy take the coin. "I'm not in favor of giving pop—"

"What's your vote against all the rest, Roy?" I asked. "The thing's settled."

"But I'm goin' to stick up for this club," continued Roy Dobel. "It's all right for pop to have what's his, and maybe the new cave ought to belong to him by rights, but no matter what's right, it sure is true that the Chinese coin belongs to Seckatary Hawkins."

Mr. Dobel went over and put his arm around his boy.

"You are right, Roy," he said softly, "and I'm not so unfair as to take away from your club fellows the things that belong to them. I wouldn't want you to think that of me. I wouldn't want this club to believe that there's any other way of doing things than the right way. Judge Cranbery, please place a credit of five hundred behind the names of each member of this club for their assistance in finding this valuable cave on my property."

Five hundred! All of us sat stunned, with open mouths, unable to talk, as we watched Mr. Dobel sit down and write out a check, which he handed to the old Judge, who was sitting back and smiling at each one of us in turn. He held up the check that Mr. Dobel had given him.

"I shall put this money on interest for you boys," said the Judge, "and when you grow up you will have a nice snug sum waiting for you to give you a start in the world. And now all the business of this meeting being finished, I make a motion that we adjourn."

There were three cheers for the Judge then. And three cheers for Mr. Dobel. And the same for Jeckerson. And after the others had all filed out of the clubhouse door, good old Doc Waters came over to me and put his arms around my shoulder.

"Good old Hawkins!" he said. "You never change. I'm proud of you, my boy."

And that meant a whole lot. I liked Doc Waters better than any man I ever knew except my daddy; and when I knew I had pleased him I felt satisfied that I had done the right thing. What it was that made him proud of me I didn't know, but I had figured out things right and done the right thing.

So now it was all ended. Trouble was gone from the river bank and vacation days were here again. How loud the singing of the birds seemed now! For weeks I hadn't even heard the birds, although they were just outside my window in the old big tree. I stood in the door with my hands in my pockets and gazed at the green banks, all thick with bushes, and I could hear the happy shouts of my clubmates as they continued their preparations for our camping expedition. Peace and quiet had come at last to the old river bank, and I smiled as I walked back into my writing room and said to myself:

"Well, that's that!"

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Later that same afternoon I heard a booming noise and wondered what it was. I listened for a few minutes, but the sound was not repeated. It sounded like the muffled roar of a cannon, and I thought to myself: "Yesterday was the Fourth of July. Somebody must have had an extra charge of cannon powder left over."

And so I went back to my writing and thought no more about it.

But as I was leaving the clubhouse I found out what that booming sound had been. Perry Stokes came up from the river and had in his hand a white envelope.

"For you, sir," he said. "Mr. Dobel sent it down by his hired man, and it's addressed to you, sir."

"Thanks, Perry," I said. "You run along back and play."

And as he went I slowly tore the envelope open and drew out a thin sheet of note paper. Here's what Mr. Dobel had written:

"We blasted out the great stone that separated the Cave of Wonders from the Wonder of Wonders. Therefore there will be no further need of the key, which I am sending back to you—for a keepsake."

I smiled as I shook my head and gazed at the Chinese coin that had been enclosed with the note. What a strange thing! Even now the old Chinese money piece had come back to me. The bad-luck coin! Would I ever get rid of it?

"Yes!" I said to myself, and I drew back my arm and threw the little copper thing far above the bushes, and I upped on my tiptoes to see it hit the river with a little splash, skip across a ripple or two, and then sink. "There!" I muttered. "We ought to have good luck from now on."

Which we did.

The next volume in this series is entitled
"THE YELLOW Y"